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78298

THE

PRINCESS AND THE BUTTERFLY;

OR, THE FANTASTICS.

A Comedy in Five Acts,

BY ARTHUR W. PINERO.

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THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

Princess Pannonia.
Sir George Lamorant, Bart.
Fay Zuliani.
Edward Oriel.
Blanche Oriel.
Lady Ringstead.
Mr. St. Roche.
Mrs. St. Roche.
Maxime Demailly.
Lady Chichele.
Major-General Sir Robert Chichele, K.C.B.
Mrs. Marsh.
Annis Marsh.
Mrs. Sabiston.
Mrs. Ware.
Lieut.-Colonel Arthur Eave.
Hon. Charles Denstroude.
Sir James Velleret, M.P.
Mr. Adrian Mylls.
Mr. Bartley Levan.
Mr. Perceval Ord.
Count Vladislaus Reviczky.
General Yanokoff.
Madame Yanokoff.
Kara Pasha.
Colonel the Hon. Reginald Ughbrook, C.B.
Mrs. Ughbrook.
Faulding.
Catherine.

THE PERSONS IN THE PLAY,

AS PRODUCED AT THE LYCEUM THEATRE, NEW YORK.

SIR GEORGE LAMORANT.....JAMES K. HACKETT
MAJ.-GEN. SIR ROBERT CHICHELE, K. C. B...CHARLES WALCOT
EDWARD ORIEL.....EDWARD MORGAN
MAXIME DEMAILLY..(His first appearance here)..WILLIAM COURTLEIGH
HON. CHARLES DENSTROUDE.....FRANK R. MILLS
MR. ST. ROCHE.....FELIX MORRIS
LIEUT.-COL. ARTHUR EAVE.....GEORGE ALISON
MR. ADRIAN MYLLS.....H. S. TABER
MR. BARTLEY LEVAN.....HENRY MULLER
MR. PERCIVAL ORD.....SEYMOUR GEORGE
FAULDING.....JOHN FINDLAY
FAY ZULIANI.....MARY MANNERING
LADY RINGSTEAD.....MRS. CHARLES WALCOT
LADY CHICHELE.....MRS. THOMAS WHIFFEN
ANNIS.....KATHARINE FLORENCE
MRS. ST. ROCHE...(Her first appearance here).....NORAH LAMISON
MRS. WARE.....(Her first appearance here).....ALISON SKIPWORTH
MRS. MARSH.....GRACE ROOT
BLANCHE ORIEL...(Her first appearance here).....HELEN MACBETH
MRS. SABISTON...(Her first appearance here).....NINA MORRIS
CATHARINE.....EVELYN CARTER
THE PRINCESS PANNONIA.....JULIE OPP

THE FIRST ACT.

LONDON.—AT THE PRINCESS PANNONIA'S, IN PARK LANE.

THE SECOND ACT.

LONDON.—AT MR. ST. ROCHE'S, IN GROSVENOR PLACE.

(*Some weeks elapse.*)

THE THIRD ACT.

PARIS.—AT THE PRINCESS PANNONIA'S, IN THE AVENUE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES.

THE FOURTH ACT.

PARIS.—ANOTHER ROOM IN THE PRINCESS PANNONIA'S HOUSE.

(*A month passes.*)

THE FIFTH ACT.

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF PARIS.—AN ORCHARD, NEAR FONTENAY-SOUS-BOIS.

THE

PRINCESS AND THE BUTTERFLY;

OR, THE FANTASTICS.

THE FIRST ACT.

The Scene represents two rooms—a bedroom and a boudoir, separated by folding doors—upon the second floor of a house in Park Lane, of which one room only, the boudoir, is revealed at the commencement of the play. The trees of the Park, bare of foliage, are seen in the distance through the windows. On the left-hand side are double-doors giving on to a landing. A bright fire is burning. A few books and a mandolin are lying upon the floor of the boudoir by the ottoman. On the settee, on the table, and upon the cabinet, are numerous fancifully-designed baskets of flowers, and some elaborate bouquets, with cards attached; and in the bedroom, fastened to the bed-curtain, is a large wreath of green leaves from which hang the Hungarian colours in streamers of ribbon. The wreath also bears a written message. A pile of unopened letters lies upon the writing-table, and on the other table is a lady's work-basket. Everything is in perfect taste, but suggestive of wealth and luxury. The light in the boudoir is that of a bright afternoon in February; the bedroom, when first disclosed, is in semi-darkness.

MRS. MARSH, *a pleasant but subdued lady of forty, is seated, engaged upon some fancy work. There is a knock at the door.*

MRS. MARSH.

Yes?

ANNIS *enters—a child-like girl of seventeen, in hat and walking-dress—carrying a bundle of lilies.*

ANNIS.

[*At the door, hesitatingly.*] Alone, mumsie?

MRS. MARSH.

What do you want, Annis?

ANNIS.

[*Going to her and kissing her—holding up the flowers.*] Look!

MRS. MARSH.

Darling, I would rather you did not run about the house so freely.

ANNIS.

Mumsie, *dear*, mayn't I present the Princess with a few flowers on her birthday?

MRS. MARSH.

Certainly. But would it not be better to give them to Catherine with a pretty little note?

ANNIS.

The Princess is always *delighted* to see me.

MRS. MARSH.

Yes, only you must remember my position here is that of a dependent, Annis.

ANNIS.

A dependent, a paid companion, a servant! You are continually calling yourself names, mumsie.

MRS. MARSH.

And you must not forget you are on a visit to *me*, my pet, not to the Princess.

ANNIS.

I am certain the Princess doesn't want any lady about her to feel reduced in circumstances. She's the sweetest thing that ever———!

MRS. MARSH.

[*Glancing at the folding doors.*] Hush!

ANNIS.

[*Subdued.*] Is she there?

MRS. MARSH.

Lying down.

ANNIS.

Out of sorts?

MRS. MARSH.

A little depressed.

ANNIS.

On her birthday!

MRS. MARSH.

Perhaps, with many other women, the Princess dislikes birthday anniversaries.

ANNIS.

That is a feeling I *can't* understand.

MRS. MARSH.

[*Smiling.*] No?

ANNIS.

Does she rebel against growing old because she is so perfectly lovely?

MRS. MARSH.

You ask too many questions, Annis.

ANNIS.

[*Embracing* MRS. MARSH.] You know you can trust me, mumsie. What's her age to-day? Thirty-eight —thirty-nine—forty—forty-one——?

MRS. MARSH.

I shall not tell you.

ANNIS.

Do you think she would like to marry again? She hasn't been a widow much more than a year.

MRS. MARSH.

Have you had a good music-lesson, Annis?

ANNIS.

[*Sitting on the ottoman*, at MRS MARSH'S *feet.*] When you're in Paris, mother, and remember your lonely girl in London, you will regret this unkindness.

MRS. MARSH.

[*Giving her hand to* ANNIS.] You minx!

ANNIS.

[*Nestling closer.*] Confide in me, then.

MRS. MARSH.

Dear, it may be that poor Princess Pannonia grudges the many wasted years of her life.

ANNIS.

Wasted! She married a Prince!

MRS. MARSH.

That's true.

ANNIS.

And lived in a castle in beautiful Hungary—she has shown me a picture of it—far away from any city or town, with mountains at the back of her, and miles and miles of blue-green forest to look out upon.

MRS. MARSH.

Yes, Annis, but to be shut up for nearly twenty years in that castle! She was in her teens when she went to Mornavitza.

ANNIS.

[*Dreamily.*] Mornavitza!

MRS. MARSH.

A budding English girl, almost a child, her eyes only half opened to life.

ANNIS.

Well, if I may have you always near me, I am quite ready to start off to my Mornavitza.

MRS. MARSH.

With an old man of sixty?

ANNIS.

Oh! was he—elderly?

MRS. MARSH.

Prince Pannonia was over eighty when he died.

ANNIS.

Oh, dear!

MRS. MARSH.

However, she was a good wife to him for those twenty years; one ought not to call them wasted years.

ANNIS.

Sixty! eighty! That's not quite my idea of a Prince.

MRS. MARSH.

No, darling—and perhaps he wasn't quite *her* idea of a Prince.

[PRINCESS PANNONIA'S *voice is indistinctly heard.*

PRINCESS.

[*In the further room.*] Evelyn—Catherine——!

MRS. MARSH.

[*Rising.*] Hark! [ANNIS *rises.*

PRINCESS.

Ah, Catherine! open the doors.

[CATHERINE, *the* PRINCESS'S *maid—a portly, grey-haired woman—appears at the folding-doors.*

CATHERINE.

[*To* MRS. MARSH.] Madame is awake.

[CATHERINE *puts back the folding-doors. The* PRINCESS *is lying upon the bed under a silken coverlet, her head concealed by the curtains.*

PRINCESS.

Who is there?

MRS. MARSH.

[*Going to the bedside.*] My troublesome girl has brought you a few flowers.

PRINCESS.

Annis!

ANNIS.

Here I am, Princess. [*Going to the bedside.*] May I wish you many happy returns of the day, Princess?

[MRS. MARSH *puts her work-basket away in the cabinet.*

PRINCESS.

Ah—! Pull up the blinds, Catherine. [CATHERINE *disappears, and a stream of daylight comes into the room.*] [*To* ANNIS.] You have brought me some flowers?

ANNIS.

These lilies.

PRINCESS.

[*Taking the flowers.*] They are charming. [*Kissing* ANNIS, *and pointing to the edge of the bed.*] Sit there.

[ANNIS *gives a little jump and seats herself upon the bed, her feet dangling.* CATHERINE *fastens back the bed-curtains.*

PRINCESS.

Annis, I am going to Paris the day after to-morrow!

ANNIS.

The day after to-morrow!

MRS. MARSH.

So soon!

PRINCESS.

On Sunday at latest. London is too *triste*. Would you like me to take you to Paris with your mother?

ANNIS.

Paris!

PRINCESS.

If you care for it, you shall come with us.

ANNIS.

Care for it! Mother!

PRINCESS.

[*Returning the flowers to* ANNIS.] Lay these flowers on my writing-table. [*To* MRS. MARSH.] Evelyn, I'll get up.

[ANNIS *places the lilies on the writing-table, then walks about excitedly.* CATHERINE *and* MRS. MARSH *assist the* PRINCESS *to rise. The* PRINCESS *is in a loose dressing-robe of rich material. She is very beautiful, but her form and face are at variance, for the latter appears younger than her figure, which is that of a mature woman.*

MRS. MARSH.

I can't thank you. How good you are!

PRINCESS.

No, no. I wish she belonged to me. My hair, Catherine. [*The* PRINCESS *sits before the dressing-table.* CATHERINE *attends to her hair.*] What is the time?

MRS. MARSH.

Half-past three. [*Shaking her head at* ANNIS, *who is dancing lightly by the window.*] Annis——!

PRINCESS.

I shall not go down stairs to-day, Evelyn. I have neuralgia.

MRS. MARSH.

Perhaps you are wise in remaining quiet.

PRINCESS.

I will see any intimate friends here. The rest must be sent away. Give orders.

MRS. MARSH.

Very well.

[*The* PRINCESS *rises and comes down with* CATHERINE, *who is carrying a pair of satin shoes. There is a knock at the door;* CATHERINE *goes to the door, opens it slightly, and talks to someone outside. The* PRINCESS *opens the letters which she finds upon the writing-table.* ANNIS *joins* MRS. MARSH.

CATHERINE.

[*At the door, to the* PRINCESS.] Lady Ringstead.

PRINCESS.

[*Reading the letters carelessly, then throwing them aside.*] Bring Lady Ringstead upstairs, Evelyn. [MRS. MARSH *goes out;* ANNIS *is following her.*] Are you very happy, Annis?

ANNIS.

Oh, Princess! awfully!

PRINCESS.

You are seventeen, aren't you?

ANNIS.

Turned seventeen.

PRINCESS.

Jaj, Istenem!—[*Sitting.*] Run away child.

[ANNIS *departs. Kneeling,* CATHERINE *exchanges the quilted slippers the* PRINCESS *is wearing for the shoes brought from the bedroom.*

PRINCESS.

[*Reading a letter—giving a little cry of pleasure.*] Ah——! [CATHERINE *looks up.*] "George Lamorant."

CATHERINE.

Madame?

PRINCESS.

An old friend, Catherine.

LADY RINGSTEAD *enters. The* PRINCESS *rises.* CATHERINE *retires to the bedroom, where she is seen, at intervals, moving about.* LADY RINGSTEAD *is a handsome, white-haired woman of fifty-seven.*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Advancing to the* PRINCESS *and kissing her.*] Well, Laura!

PRINCESS.

How do you do, Aunt Mary?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

You have settled Paris, Mrs. Marsh tells me.

PRINCESS.

Finally. [*With a gesture of distaste.*] London——!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Oh, London is all right, Laura, I assure you.

PRINCESS.

I had a letter from Madame de Trémorel this morning. I can have possession of her house immediately.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

I know the house—a rather rococo-looking place in the Champs Élysées——

PRINCESS.

Will you come and stay with me? I mean to emerge completely from my shell, in Paris, and to entertain——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Good!

PRINCESS.

You could help me.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

By all means, my dear. Indeed, I'll come to you at once if you can make it convenient.

PRINCESS.

That's delightful! [*Laughing.*] But London is all right, eh?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Sitting.*] Decidedly preferable to Paris. Only, under any circumstances, I must be in Paris for the next month or six weeks, to keep an eye on my young people.

PRINCESS.

[*Sitting.*] Blanche—— ?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

And her brother Edward. Of course, they are no longer children—but I shall always consider them my charges, poor orphans.

PRINCESS.

Orphans—— ?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Orphans. Their father is writing a History of England. Surely you've heard that?

PRINCESS.

[*Her thoughts wandering.*] Yes.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

No man who is writing a History of England may be considered to be alive. Mr. Austin Oriel committed suicide—that is, sat down to his History—fifteen years ago, on the day after he lost his wife.

PRINCESS.

She was poor uncle Ringstead's—what—not sister—— ?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Half-sister. How dreadfully rusty you've got in family matters, Laura!

PRINCESS.

I am glad Blanche is to be in Paris. She and I are going to be excellent friends.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

I am pleased to hear it.

PRINCESS.

But what takes Blanche to Paris?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

She looks after Edward.

PRINCESS.

I thought *you* did that.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Not his clothes, my dear Laura.

PRINCESS.

Must somebody look after Mr. Edward Oriel's clothes?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

He is so terribly abstracted. An extraordinary brain, the boy has. Do you know what they say? They say the first drafts of Lord Tentenure's recent despatches to Russia were really prepared by Edward. That, for a young man of six or seven and twenty! But when it comes to cravats, and such fallals, he is feebleness itself. A valet interrupts his train of thought, he says. *He breaks a valet's heart*, my dear—that's the truth of it. Oh, but Edward is exceptionally able. If only he were a trifle less serious!

PRINCESS.

He is private secretary to Lord Tentenure, is he not?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Unpaid—yes, till the end of the year, when he goes into the House, and plays the game on his own hook, as it were.

PRINCESS.

The Foreign Secretary himself is a slovenly-looking man.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Precisely. But Tentenure has humour. In a politician, humour—well-disciplined humour—will not only carry off a frayed shirt and a vile hat—it will keep the gallery under control.

PRINCESS.

The gallery?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

The masses. There lies Edward's weakness. On my knees, Laura, I pray that it may ultimately be given to Edward to tickle the ribs of the gallery.

PRINCESS.

Amen, aunt!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Rising.*] You've a window open.

PRINCESS.

I'll close it.

[*The* PRINCESS *closes the window.* LADY RINGSTEAD *moves to the fire.*

PRINCESS.

So Blanche goes to Paris to look after Mr. Oriel's neckties. And what does Mr. Oriel do in Paris—enjoy himself?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Enjoy himself! Edward! [*Sitting.*] My dear, Edward accompanies his chief, who, of course, represents our poor old country at this farce of an International Conference which is to assemble at the Quay d'Orsay. We shall lose everything in time, Laura—England, I mean—in spite of Tentenure's firmness. Lord help us all! Edward and Blanche have been asked to put up with the Tentenures at the Embassy—extremely kind. Well, England will see me out, I suppose—! You are going downstairs this afternoon, I hope, Laura?

PRINCESS

[*Walking about restlessly.*] No.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

How provoking you are! I have *ordered* Edward, positively ordered him, to call here between four and five, so that I may present him to you.

PRINCESS.

Oh, save me from solemn young politicians!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Laura, I *ask* you to know Edward. I think, if I could get him to visit at a few houses, and to mix with some more-or-less empty-headed people—I don't mean you, Laura——

PRINCESS.

I have been in London nearly six weeks; Mr. Oriel has made no sign of recognition of my existence.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Six weeks! some of the people he is most devoted to have not set eyes on him for six years.

PRINCESS.

Well, Catherine shall put me into a gown, and I will receive him here—[*pausing by the writing-table, taking up a note*] oh, yes—and then I shall be able to see George Lamorant.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Lamorant? Ah, something must be amiss with our old friend the Butterfly.

PRINCESS.

What?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Money or liver, I presume. I hear he is selling his pictures and bric-à-brac.

PRINCESS.

[*Reading the note again.*] He is about to wave his hand to England—so he expresses it—in final adieu. [*Thoughtfully.*] Poor Butterfly! I haven't met George Lamorant for one-and-twenty years.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

You'll find him greatly altered.

PRINCESS.

And he—[*laying the note aside quickly*] no, I won't let him see me.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Nonsense! you can draw the blinds down, or sit with your back to the light.

PRINCESS.

Oh, don't be cruel, aunt!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Rising.*] Tut, tut, tut! You too have no sense of humour. That reminds me—I have forgotten to congratulate you, my dear.

PRINCESS.

[*Giving her hand to* LADY RINGSTEAD *across the back of the settee.*] Thanks for your flowers, aunt Mary. But you should have sent me a wreath of immortelles.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Fiddle! you are wearing surprisingly well.

PRINCESS.

I have entered my fortieth year. I'm forty! forty!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

An Englishwoman's forty is not at all contemptible.

PRINCESS.

Even an Englishwoman cannot remain forty. Oh, I am going to be an old hag!

LADY RINGSTEAD

Like myself?

PRINCESS.

[*Sinking on to the ottoman.*] No, no; you are a pretty old woman. I shall fret myself as ugly as sin.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Looking down upon the* PRINCESS.] Laura, you are morbid.

PRINCESS.

It is London that is upsetting me. What a fool I was to come back, to think I should find the same London!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Sitting.*] You ought to feel well here—on this spot particularly. You were born round the corner.

PRINCESS.

I was *young* just round the corner.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

And, pray, do you imagine you will be a girl again in Paris?

PRINCESS.

No. But Paris is the middle-aged woman's paradise.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Not for imported goods, my dear. I tried it years ago.

PRINCESS.

Ah! Did you feel as I feel now, in your middle-life?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Don't be inquisitive.

PRINCESS.

So *you* are mortal, aunt!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Nothing of the kind!

PRINCESS.

It is all right and comfortable, I suppose, for the woman, when she has once laboured across the bridge between middle-age and old age. But the bridge is such a colossal piece of engineering. There are so many spans to it—the years leading from forty to fifty——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*In a softer tone.*] I comforted myself, during *my* journey, with looking after Blanche and Edward.

PRINCESS.

Ah, if I had some tie of that kind——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

However, we must all submit to the inevitable. The luckiest woman enjoys little more than twenty years of splendour and triumph. I had my twenty years—and a few over. You, I hope, have still some of these years before you——

PRINCESS.

It is unfair! I have lost *my* twenty years!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Lost them——?

PRINCESS.

Dropped them, one by one, like pearls from a string, at Mornavitza.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

It was unfortunate that Prince Pannonia's health gave way as it did—most unfortunate.

PRINCESS.

[*Dryly.*] Most.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

You had a dull time, doubtless.

PRINCESS.

For exactly nineteen years and eleven months I was nothing but half-nurse, half-secretary to a delicate recluse. I wrote Pannonia's letters—he was a voluminous correspondent on many uninteresting subjects; gave my arm to him when he walked about our estate; sat by his side when he drove out. For twenty years!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

No visitors?

PRINCESS.

You know——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Oh, I know you never invited *me*.

PRINCESS.

Pannonia hated to be disturbed, to have one day made unlike another.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

You, yourselves, visited?

PRINCESS.

Four times we went to Vienna, and to Budapest —on each occasion he was extremely unwell; and twice, for the waters, to Gastein. Those wretched waters nearly killed him.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Perhaps you ought to have persevered with them?

PRINCESS.

[*Reproachfully.*] Aunt—— !

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Laurie, why did you marry him?

PRINCESS.

People allowed me to do it. It was—an excellent marriage—[*Going to* LADY RINGSTEAD *and putting an arm about her shoulders.*] Oh, aunt, don't think I am speaking against Pannonia! He was invariably kind to me, poor dear.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Patting her hand.*] Glad—glad.

PRINCESS.

[*Staring before her, with watery eyes.*] I respected him—yes, and loved him. I did! He was a very good father.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

He! Gracious! I never heard——

PRINCESS.

Tsch! you don't understand—a very good father to *me*.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

How stupid I am! [*Looking up at her.*] Tut, tut, tut! you're not going to grizzle!

CATHERINE, *who has disappeared from the bedroom some time previously, now enters.*

CATHERINE.

Mrs. St. Roche—Mrs. Sabiston.

MRS. ST. ROCHE *and* MRS. SABISTON *enter.* MRS. ST. ROCHE *is eight-and-thirty, petite, eager, restless.* MRS. SABISTON *is a stout, handsome woman of forty, with big, limpid eyes and a heavy, placid air. Both ladies are richly and elegantly dressed.* CATHERINE *withdraws.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Meeting the* PRINCESS.] Every good wish of my heart, Laura!

PRINCESS.

[*Kissing her.*] It is sweet of you to come.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

I have brought Edith; I found her loafing in the Park.—[*To* LADY RINGSTEAD.] How do you do, Lady Ringstead?

PRINCESS.

[*Kissing* MRS. SABISTON.] Delighted.

MRS. SABISTON.

[*With a slight drawl.*] It doesn't matter, perhaps, but Isabel is not in the least accurate——

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Examining the flowers.*] What wonderful orchids!

PRINCESS.

[*To* MRS. SABISTON.] You know my aunt, Lady Ringstead? [*To* LADY RINGSTEAD, *who has risen.*] Mrs. Sabiston.

[MRS. SABISTON *goes to* LADY RINGSTEAD; *they shake hands.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Over the flowers.*] And these anemones! Exquisite! [*Going behind the screen.*] More flowers!

MRS. SABISTON.

[*To* LADY RINGSTEAD.] Isn't it a little rough, Lady Ringstead? Days ago I made up my mind to see Laura on her birthday, and now Mrs. St. Roche gives out that she picks me up casually in the Park and drags me along with her.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Didn't I find you sitting upon a chair looking at nothing?

MRS. SABISTON.

Not at nothing. I was contemplating my dinner.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

In the Park!

MRS. SABISTON.

Yes. I have had a disgusting lunch. Whenever I have been put out in that way, I sit for a few moments quietly, and conjure up my dinner. It is a faculty I have.

PRINCESS.

[*Taking a bouquet and a basket of flowers from the top of the cabinet.*] Mrs. St. Roche and Mrs. Sabiston send me these, aunt.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Exceedingly beautiful.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Entering the bedroom and examining the wreath attached to the bed-curtain.*] May one look at this? Where has this come from?

PRINCESS.

[*Replacing the flowers on the cabinet.*] From Mornavitza. Catherine hung it there, foolish woman.

MRS. SABISTON.

[*Examining the card attached to the wreath.*] What a spidery-looking language! It means——?

PRINCESS.

"From where the leaves still listen for a beloved footfall."

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Charming!

PRINCESS.

The gardeners have picked those leaves from a narrow little alley in an Italian garden at Mornavitza. I walked there alone nearly every morning for twenty years—for half-an-hour, while poor Pannonia was having his bath.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

How nice of your people to recollect! Did you get my note?

PRINCESS.

[*Turning over her letters.*] Ah, yes——

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

You are coming to the theatre with me to-night?

PRINCESS.

[*Shaking her head.*] The neuralgia is troublesome again.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

You may as well have your neuralgia in my box. Edith has promised——

MRS. SABISTON.

To come on late. Theatres interfere with dinner so horribly. [*To* LADY RINGSTEAD.] Don't they?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

I confess I hardly care to sit down to dinner at half-past six.

MRS. SABISTON.

Oh, I don't mind that—but I cannot undertake to rise at half-past seven.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*To the* PRINCESS.] There will be no men. My husband has a rowdy little party at home, to say good-bye to Sir George Lamorant. You won't come with me?

PRINCESS.

Excuse me to-night, dear Isabel.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

You are perfectly horrid when you choose, Laura. You will never meet Miss Zuliani. Isn't she delightful, Edith?

MRS. SABISTON.

Quite. Such a sweet person, Lady Ringstead!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Miss——?

MRS. SABISTON.

Zuliani—a friend of Isabel's.

MRS ST. ROCHE.

[*To* LADY RINGSTEAD.] Mr. St. Roche calls her *La Belle Cosmopolite*. She is the daughter of an Englishwoman who married a poor Italian musical man, and she has lived all over the world. Sir George Lamorant knew the parents, and has asked me to interest myself in Fay.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Fay?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Fay Zuliani.

CATHERINE *enters.*

CATHERINE.

Lady Chichele.

LADY CHICHELE *enters—a pretty, simple-mannered, daintily-dressed little woman of fifty.* CATHERINE *goes into the bedroom.*

PRINCESS.

[*Meeting* LADY CHICHELE,—*gladly.*] Ah!

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Kissing the* PRINCESS.] I have run in to wish you many happy returns of the day, and to—[*turning to* LADY RINGSTEAD, *and kissing her.*] Why, how are you, Mary? [*To* MRS. ST. ROCHE.] Isabel! [*Kissing her.*] What a pretty frock you have on! [*To* MRS. SABISTON, *who comes to* LADY CHICHELE.] Who is it? [*Kissing* MRS. SABISTON.] Dear heart! it's Editb Sabiston. This is pleasant—meeting you girls.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

You are always so cheerful, Winifred—an example for younger people.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Sitting.*] Ha, ha! Not always cheerful, but to-day —well, I am very happy to-day. My husband has telegraphed to me from Port Said, ordering me to meet him at Brindisi on Saturday. I am off to-night.

[LADY RINGSTEAD *sits.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Sitting.*] Sir Robert is coming home?

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Nodding.*] On leave.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

A long drag, Winifred—to Brindisi. Why not let him join you at the Riviera?

LADY CHICHELE.

Under the eyes of everybody! No, dear, from Brindisi we intend taking the train to Taranto——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Taranto! a hole!

LADY CHICHELE.

Certainly, but Bob and I must hide ourselves somewhere for a week or two.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Why?

MRS. SABISTON.

Hide!

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Slightly embarrassed.*] Until we—until we—can look people in the face.

MRS. SABISTON.

I don't——

LADY CHICHELE.

[*To* MRS. ST. ROCHE *and* MRS. SABISTON.] Ah, my dears, you must go back to the time of your honeymoons, to understand. You are fortunate girls who are never separated from your husbands. But the disagreeable doctors have always forbidden me India, and for many years Sir Robert and I have met only at long intervals.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Demurely.*] You are not quite accustomed to one another?

LADY CHICHELE.

We are naturally a little constrained, a little bashful, when we meet. I yearn to see him again, but almost dread it. It is so very awkward for both of us.

[*The* PRINCESS, MRS. ST. ROCHE, *and* MRS. SABISTON *laugh lightly. The* PRINCESS *bends over* LADY CHICHELE *and kisses her.*

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Going to the fireplace, in a flutter.*] Now, now, now! I won't be laughed at!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Joining* LADY CHICHELE.] Certainly not! [*Looking at the clock.*] Laura, don't forget you have to dress.

PRINCESS.

[*Calling.*] Catherine! [CATHERINE *appears in the bedroom.*] I'll dress, quickly. Draw the screen.

[CATHERINE *arranges the screen so that it completely covers the opening to the bedroom.*

PRINCESS.

[*To everybody, as she unfastens a bracelet.*] Do go on chattering. Let me hear the hum of your voices.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Suddenly coming to the* PRINCESS.] Ah, how stupid! —[*Producing a jeweller's case from her pocket.*] I have a bangle for you, Laura.

PRINCESS.

Oh, Lady Chichele——!

LADY CHICHELE.

It's nothing. You possess everything. [*Taking the bangle from its case.*] But the idea may amuse you. You see—simply a plain gold band with little coins attached to it.

PRINCESS.

[*Taking the bangle.*] Very pretty.

LADY CHICHELE.

They are merely gilt three-penny pieces. But, count them.

PRINCESS.

[*Attempting to count the coins.*] There are so many.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Smilingly.*] I had better tell you. There is one for each year.

PRINCESS.

[*Blankly.*] Each year——!

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Nodding.*] Each year.

[MRS. ST. ROCHE *and* MRS. SABISTON *unobtrusively move away to the window.* LADY RINGSTEAD *gazes into the fire.*

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Putting the bangle on the* PRINCESS'S *wrist.*] One three-penny piece for each of your birthdays. I shall add a fresh coin every February for as long as I am spared to do so.

[*There is a brief silence. The* PRINCESS *looks at the bangle piteously, then towards her friends and* LADY RINGSTEAD.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Also looking round, puzzled.*] What is the matter?

PRINCESS.

[*Impulsively, with a laugh that is half pathetic, throwing her arms round* LADY CHICHELE.] Oh, you dear, simple little woman!

[*She runs away, passes behind the screen, and disappears into the bedroom.*

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Hurrying to the screen.*] What is it? I have done something wrong!

PRINCESS.

[*From the other side of the screen.*] No, no! But aunt Mary and I have been talking over the terrors of middle-age——

MRS. SABISTON.

[*Going to the screen.*] Laura, how could you! The topic is too painful.

LADY CHICHELE.

Ah! let me have that horrid bracelet again!

PRINCESS.

Never! Ha, ha! I must get used to the weight of it! [*Her voice receding.*] Catherine——!

LADY CHICHELE.

Oh, Mary, I am exceedingly sorry.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Rubbish! women must not be cowards.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Penitently, to everybody.*] You see, dears, I have not thought very much about middle-age.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*A little impatiently.*] It is the woman's fault if she has any middle-age, Lady Chichele.

MRS. SABISTON.

Really! Pray tell me how one is to avoid it.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Fight it! Don't admit it! never admit it!

MRS. SABISTON.

To others?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Even to yourself. Watch yourself, hour by hour. Signs of middle-life are only weeds in a garden; root them up, the moment they appear.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

That applies to outward and visible signs. Science deals with *them*—we all know that.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Distressed.*] Oh, dear me!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

But the subtle signs, dear Mrs. St. Roche—weeds which elude the vigilance of the gardener?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] Of course, there are good and bad gardeners.

MRS. SABISTON.

Subtle signs?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Take the most unerring, and insidious, symptom of middle-age in a woman.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Sharply.*] What is that?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

An appetite for dinner in other people's houses——

MRS. SABISTON.

[*Turning away, wounded—sitting on the settee.*] Oh, Lady Ringstead!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Going to her.*] My dear, pardon me! But, then, you have *always* enjoyed an excellent appetite, if I recollect rightly.

MRS. SABISTON.

Never so violent as now.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Ha, ha! Edith, you are a bad gardener!

MRS. SABISTON.

[*Desperately.*] Oh, I don't care! I believe the best way to get through middle-life is to be selfish and lazy, and to grow stout and lethargic as I am doing——

LADY CHICHELE.

You believe nothing of the kind!

MRS. SABISTON.

I do. And I mean to yield to hunger, and to sleep, on every possible occasion.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Walking about.*] Usually, you know, the career of a woman, who starts with possessing some attractions, is divided into three stages.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Indeed?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Yes; and the clever woman's triumph is in prolonging the first stage, so that her life has no time to admit the second.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

What are your three stages, pray?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

First, the period during which people willingly offer their devotion.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

People? Men?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Evasively.*] People. That is the happy stage.

MRS. SABISTON.

Certainly. That is Happiness.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

The second stage is reached when she has to *exact* devotion. [*Bending over the flowers, her face averted from the others.*] That is Wretchedness.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Eyeing* MRS. ST. ROCHE.] Yes, that is wretchedness.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

The third stage—when she neither receives nor demands it.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

That is Contentment.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*To* MRS. ST. ROCHE.] When she is satisfied with the simple affection of husband, children, or friends. Ah, my dears, there is the haven to make for.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Brushing past* LADY CHICHELE *and* LADY RINGSTEAD.] Of course, of course. [*At the fireplace, looking at the clock.*] I must be going.

A Woman-servant enters, showing in BLANCHE *and* EDWARD ORIEL. BLANCHE *is a fresh, buoyant, unaffected girl of three-and-twenty.* EDWARD *is an intellectual-looking young man of about twenty-seven, with a grave air. He is very soberly dressed, in a fashion that distinguishes him from the "man about town." The Servant retires.*

BLANCHE.

[*Advancing to* LADY RINGSTEAD—*nodding to* MRS. ST. ROCHE *and* MRS. SABISTON *as she passes them.*] How d'ye do? how d'ye do? [*Kissing* LADY RINGSTEAD.] Well, auntie! [*Going to* LADY CHICHELE.] Good afternoon, dear Lady Chichele.

LADY CHICHELE.

My dear Blanche!——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Meeting* EDWARD *and looking him up and down.*] You are a little pale, Edward. You feel well?

EDWARD.

[*With a smile.*] Quite well.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Giving a little twist to the bow at his neck.*] That's right.

[BLANCHE *joins* MRS. ST. ROCHE *and* MRS. SABISTON *by the fireplace.* EDWARD *advances to* LADY CHICHELE, *and shakes hands with her.*

LADY CHICHELE.

Edward, do you recollect fixing an afternoon to come and drink tea with me, nearly twelve months ago?

EDWARD.

Ah! I hope I sent an apology?

LADY CHICHELE.

Apology! yes. But you knew I had got together some of the sweetest girls in London to meet you.

EDWARD.

Blanche told me that some ladies——

LADY CHICHELE.

Silly child! she let it out just as you were leaving the house to come to me, I heard. And then you put down your hat and ran upstairs, saying you were busy.

EDWARD.

A year ago! Be kind and allow that I may have forgotten the precise circumstances——

LADY CHICHELE.

Your aunt is trying to catch your eye. Go to your doom.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Who has joined the others.*] Edward—— [EDWARD *and* LADY CHICHELE *move to the fireplace.*] Mrs. Sabiston — Mrs. Ronald St. Roche — Mr. Edward Oriel.

BLANCHE.

Where is Laura?

LADY CHICHELE.

In the next room.

BLANCHE.

[*Going to the screen, calling.*] Laura!

PRINCESS.

[*In the distance.*] Ah! Blanche dear——!

BLANCHE.

Many happy returns of the day!

[*A bare, white arm is extended from behind the screen.*

PRINCESS.

[*Behind the screen.*] Thanks.

BLANCHE.

[*Taking the* PRINCESS'S *hand and speaking quietly.*] My brother Edward is here.

PRINCESS.

Ah—!

[*The arm is withdrawn, and the folding doors are closed sharply.* LADY RINGSTEAD *joins* BLANCHE; *they talk together by the settee.* MRS. MARSH *enters followed by two Women*

servants who carry tea, et cetera. The Servants place their trays upon the table, and withdraw. MRS. MARSH *seats herself at the table and pours out tea.* EDWARD *attends upon the ladies assembled round the fire.*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*To* BLANCHE, *while this is going on, watching* EDWARD.] Edward has rather a smart air, for *him*, this afternoon. He reflects credit upon you, dear.

BLANCHE.

Thanks, aunt.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

I could wish that he would button his coat. And perhaps—*perhaps* I like to see the trouser conceal a little more of the boot.

BLANCHE.

I will tell Edward.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Ah, how annoying! on one side, too much of the boot is hidden.

BLANCHE.

It struck me it was so, coming upstairs.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

This is extremely careless of you, Blanche.

BLANCHE.

Auntie, some matters I *must* leave to Edward.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Dear fellow! it delights me to watch him playing chevalier——

[*A cup slips on its saucer and falls. There are movements, apologies, and a little laughter among the tea-drinkers.*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Stonily.*] Whose clumsiness was that? [BLANCHE *shakes her head.*] Edward's?

BLANCHE.

I hope not. [LADY RINGSTEAD *sits gloomily.*] Aunt, it is my impression that Edward will never be quite at his ease with women. Sometimes I fancy he positively dislikes them.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

It isn't desirable that he should *like* them, only that he should talk to them, command them. The man who can retain the attention of a half-a-dozen women for five minutes has the power of holding the House of Commons for an hour. [*Suddenly.*] Good heavens! look at those women now! They're not listening to Edward! they're not listening to him!

BLANCHE.

Poor boy! he isn't saying anything, aunt.

EDWARD.

[*Approaching* LADY RINGSTEAD.] May I bring you some tea?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Rising.*] I'll come to the table. Here is Laura.

The PRINCESS *enters, beautifully gowned. She meets* EDWARD.

PRINCESS.

[*Giving him her hand.*] Mr. Oriel. [BLANCHE *and the* PRINCESS *greet each other; then* BLANCHE *and* LADY RINGSTEAD *join the group by the fireplace and drink tea.*] I believe I saw you once, when you were a very small boy.

EDWARD.

In Hans Place. Strange to say, I remember you.

PRINCESS.

[*Smiling.*] Older people than yourself don't make me such speeches.

EDWARD.

[*Stiffly.*] Pardon me. I mean, I was a child of five—six——

PRINCESS.

Of course. What do you remember of the occasion?

EDWARD.

I remember that our visitor was exceptionally tall and slender; that it hurt my neck to stare up at her. [*Thoughtfully, not looking at her.*] I remember comparing you, after you had gone, with my mother.

PRINCESS.

[*With slightly elevated brow.*] Really?

EDWARD.

My poor mother was youthful-looking to the last.

PRINCESS.

Yes, yes, very delicate and willowy——

EDWARD.

As you were then.

PRINCESS.

[*With a frown, abruptly turning to* MRS. MARSH, *who comes with a cup of tea.*] Thank you, I will have some tea. [MRS. MARSH *places the tea upon the table, and then joins the group. The* PRINCESS *sits and motions to* EDWARD *to sit.*] So you are a very serious person now-a-days, they tell me, Mr. Oriel.

EDWARD.

[*Sitting.*] Ah! Lady Ringstead——

PRINCESS.

Yes. I think she regards extreme seriousness in budding statesmen with some distrust.

EDWARD.

To be earnest is to be serious.

PRINCESS.

Yet seriousness is not, necessarily, earnestness. Seriousness may be—no matter.

EDWARD.

Dullness—heaviness—stupidity.

PRINCESS.

Perhaps it is to the advantage of a clever man's seriousness that it should be lighted up occasionally—just to show what it is really composed of.

[*She drinks her tea, looking away from him. His face now shows that he has become interested in her. He is sitting, elbow on table, gazing at her curiously. There is a brief silence.*

PRINCESS.

[*Turning to him.*] Eh-h-h?

[*He takes her empty cup from her, replacing it on the table.*

EDWARD.

[*Drawing nearer to her.*] Princess, I have little confidence in the man who can punctuate his ponderous periods with strokes of fun. Examine the dual nature—you will find it but half a nature. And, besides, don't you feel that this quality of Humour, this saving grace of life, which Lady Ringstead is always insisting upon, really acts upon people and things as the corruptive particles in the air act upon the details of a fine piece of architecture? [*His eyes still upon her.*] For an example, take beauty in women. Even beauty in women must be looked at with serious eyes—humour anticipates its defacements. *You* are serious. I see it.

PRINCESS.

[*Rising, uneasy under his gaze.*] I—? Oh, yes, I have been serious for twenty years.

EDWARD.

[*Rising.*] Ah——!

PRINCESS.

But hardly a day has passed when I have not shut myself up in my room for a few moments, to shriek with laughter.

EDWARD.

Laughter! at what?

PRINCESS.

[*With a shake of her head*] Ah, ha! [*Lightly.*] If you choose, we shall meet in Paris, Mr. Oriel—Aunt Mary will tell you. She will be with me. Let us see you often, and teach you how to laugh.

EDWARD.

[*Interested.*] You are to be in Paris?

PRINCESS.

My friends are going—— [*Meeting* LADY CHICHELE, MRS. SABISTON, *and* MRS. ST. ROCHE.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*To the* PRINCESS.] These girls have promised to take me home.

PRINCESS.

[*Kissing* LADY CHICHELE.] Send me an address where I may write to you. So good of you to come to-day. [*Kissing* MRS. SABISTON *and* MRS. ST. ROCHE.] And you, dear. And you.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Shaking hands with* EDWARD.] I shall never ask you to tea again, Edward.

EDWARD.

Please—— !

[MRS. SABISTON *and* MRS. ST. ROCHE *bow to* EDWARD ; *the* PRINCESS *walks with them to the door.* LADY RINGSTEAD *and* BLANCHE *join* EDWARD.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*To* EDWARD.] I *have* to go to Down Street, Edward. I need not drag you and Blanche away.

BLANCHE.

Oh, Edward *must* do some shopping this afternoon, aunt. I insist upon it.

PRINCESS.

[*At the door.*] Good-bye. Good-bye.

[LADY CHICHELE, MRS. SABISTON, *and* MRS. ST. ROCHE *disappear.* *The* PRINCESS *rings the bell.*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Kissing the* PRINCESS] I shall endeavour to see you to-morrow, Laura—to settle dates.

[BLANCHE *kisses the* PRINCESS.

PRINCESS.

[*To* BLANCHE.] Must you go ? [*Accompanying* LADY RINGSTEAD *and* BLANCHE *to the door.*] To-morrow, aunt.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

If possible.

[LADY RINGSTEAD *and* BLANCHE *go out.*

PRINCESS.

[*Shaking hands with* EDWARD, *who follows them.*] Nous nous reverrons à Paris, sans adieu.

EDWARD.

In Paris, yes, But to be serious.

PRINCESS.

[*Laughingly.*] No, no—to laugh.

[*He bows and goes out.*

PRINCESS.

[*Going to the writing-table.*] Now—! Help me with my letters, Evelyn. [*Suddenly.*] Why—! I have forgotten to tell Edith and Bella that we are leaving London——!

[*She makes for the door quickly as* CATHERINE *enters.*

CATHERINE.

Sir George Lamorant.

SIR GEORGE LAMORANT *enters, coming face to face with the* PRINCESS. *She gazes at him, with widely-opened eyes, for a moment, pained, astonished.* CATHERINE

withdraws. SIR GEORGE *is a handsome man of forty-five, with a thin, delicate-looking frame, a pale face, and hair almost completely silvered. His manner is light and charming, and he is perfectly attired.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*After the silence.*] I read your thoughts.

PRINCESS.

[*Giving him her hand.*] Ah! one-and-twenty years—— !

SIR GEORGE.

[*Making a grimace.*] Ugh!

PRINCESS.

And why have you not called until to-day?

SIR GEORGE.

I was shy of reminding you, by my hoary locks, of those one-and-twenty years. [*Gallantly.*] Time has flown high above you, Princess.

[MRS. MARSH *retires into the bedroom.*

PRINCESS.

[*Sitting.*] Much has happened since we last met.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Sitting.*] One-and-twenty years have happened.

PRINCESS.

I mean, the baronetcy, and your uncle's money, falling to you so unexpectedly—your finding yourself independent of the humdrum Colonial office.

SIR GEORGE.

Pleasant, humdrum Colonial office!

PRINCESS.

I ought to have written to you when I heard of your good fortune—[*with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders*] but I didn't.

SIR GEORGE.

You received *my* few lines of congratulation, a year ago, I hope?

PRINCESS.

[*Stonily.*] I received a message of sympathy from you, after poor Pannonia's death.

SIR GEORGE.

Ah, I'm glad you had it—[*blankly*] I beg your pardon. What did I say?

PRINCESS.

[*Looking away.*] You said—congratulation.

SIR GEORGE.

[*His hand to his brow.*] Heavens! this is the result of Broadbent forbidding me sugar and champagne.

PRINCESS.

[*Rising.*] Let me give you some sugarless tea, George.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Rising.*] Thanks—do. [*She goes behind the table and pours out tea.*] I heard of you incarcerating yourself, after your bereavement, at Schloss Stuhlweissen, with the old Countess Csasky.

PRINCESS.

I desired to spend my first year of widowhood in that way.

SIR GEORGE.

Suttee! what a year you must have passed!

PRINCESS.

For shame! [*Handing him a cup of tea.*] I had lost a good husband.

[*They sit again.*

SIR GEORGE.

Ah, of course. [*Drinking his tea.*] But now—now, at last, you intend to enjoy life?

PRINCESS.

[*Bitterly.*] Intend!

SIR GEORGE.

Eh?

PRINCESS.

[*Hastily.*] About yourself. You are going abroad?

SIR GEORGE.

Yes.

PRINCESS.

But—never to return to your beloved London? Surely you don't mean that?

SIR GEORGE.

I do.

PRINCESS.

Why?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Placing his cup aside.*] To get rid of the tombstones.

PRINCESS.

Tombstones?

SIR GEORGE.

My beloved London 's full of 'em. Piccadilly, Pall Mall, Bond Street—they are all paved with tombstones.

PRINCESS.

[*Softly.*] George.

SIR GEORGE.

Laura?

PRINCESS.

What's the matter?

SIR GEORGE.

Forty-five is the matter. Middle-age is the matter.

PRINCESS.

[*Under her breath—staring at him.*] Middle-age!

SIR GEORGE.

Your faithful Butterfly—a suggestive nickname, my dear Princess—has come to his autumn. His body shrivels, his poor wings are little else than dust. Oh, ho! *Vanitas vanitatum! Eheu! fugaces*—and all the rest of it. What is there left, for forty-five?

PRINCESS.

Why, I have thought that such moods are purely feminine moods.

SIR GEORGE.

So have I, until recently. And now I've made the discovery—a man is as human as a woman.

PRINCESS.

[*Reproachfully.*] As weak?

SIR GEORGE.

Upon my soul, I believe there isn't much to choose between 'em. Much to choose! They're alike—absolutely alike. The same tide rises in both—rises, beats merrily against their ribs for a few years, and then ebbs. It's an uncomfortable sensation, Princess, I can tell you—to hear the lapping of that tide as it turns within you and begins to go down. [*Unnoticed by him, with a movement of pain, she half-rises, then sits again; he jumps up.*] Phew-w-w—! [*Shaking himself.*] Ha, ha, ha! At any rate, I've arrived at the conclusion that no man should be old in his own country. Merciful powers! every friend I have is developing some infirmity or other. This morning I hear that Rawson has phlebitis and will never do more than crawl with a stick. Petres writes me he no longer comes out o' nights. Horrible! And, at the same time, while familiar things pain me, the sight of a new face, or of any fresh object, throws me into a sullen, resentful rage. They've knocked down my chemist's shop, where I have bought perfumes for twenty years, and stuck another—a red-brick pile—in its place. And to-day, when I venture there with my doctor's latest prescription, they stare at me from behind the counter—as much as to say, "Hullo! are you still going about? Why, you used to come to the old shop!" And there's no more '81 champagne at my club! Not that it would make

much difference to *me* if there were. But it's all '89 now! Fancy! no more '84! [*Walking away to the window, where he stands looking out, his back towards her.*] And so I'm off, out of it, to places which recall nothing; to places unknown to me, where I am unknown; where I can pretend that I've never been young, that I've always, always, been an old fellow, and that I—like it!

PRINCESS.

[*Faintly.*] Oh, George—! one would think to-day is your birthday, also. Is it?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Turning to her.*] My birthday? No.

PRINCESS.

Ha! it is mine.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking round.*] Flowers—! [*Removing an orchid from his coat and presenting it to her.*] A thousand good wishes.

PRINCESS.

[*Laying her hand upon his sleeve.*] My dear old friend. Oh, oh-h-h-h, this folly! [*Her grip tightening.*] Come! let us look forward to the time—you and I—when we shall have waded through this Slough of Despond.

SIR GEORGE.

[*In astonishment.*] *You* and I! What! My dear Princess, not *you*, already! [*She nods, rises, with a little, hysterical laugh; he laughs.*] No, no, no, no! Ha, ha, ha! *you* are still a fresh, beautiful woman——

PRINCESS.

[*Imperatively.*] Sssh! no more! [*Waving the subject away with a gesture.*] Ah—! [*In another tone.*] When do you leave London?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Hesitatingly.*] H'm—! Frankly, that rather depends upon the advice, help perhaps, that I'm going to ask you to give me.

PRINCESS.

Help? [*Sitting.*] Command me, George.

SIR GEORGE.

In the first place, I must contrive to gain your sympathy for a young lady.

PRINCESS.

A young—?

SIR GEORGE.

A Miss Zuliani.

PRINCESS.

Miss Fay Zuliani?

SIR GEORGE.

You've met her?

PRINCESS.

No, but Mrs. St. Roche wished me to go to the theatre to-night, to make Miss Zuliani's acquaintance. Who is Miss Zuliani?

SIR GEORGE.

[*After a short pause.*] Don't be angry with me. Once upon a time you were very fond of my brother. [*She rises.*] If Rupert hadn't been so devilish poor, he might not have had to die in a foreign swamp—and you might have been my sister-in-law. Well—that's how I've always understood the case. [*She stands looking into the fire.*] *De mortuis*, Princess. You guess?

PRINCESS.

Is this girl Rupert's daughter?

SIR GEORGE.

Yes. [*She sits upon the settee, without speaking.*] The mother was a Miss Wentworth. I knew her—a graceful creature with curiously beautiful hands. She used to sit to Bouguereau, and other big painters, for her hands. About a year after the child was born, the lady married a flashy Italian, and went off with him to Milan—a violoncello-player, a Mr. Flavio Zuliani, a black brute.

PRINCESS.

When *was* the child born?

SIR GEORGE.

She's nineteen.

PRINCESS.

Your brother—soon—forgot——

SIR GEORGE.

Never. Only, his life went to hell after—[*looking at her*] after——

PRINCESS.

[*Faintly.*] Oh, go on!

SIR GEORGE.

The black brute, Mr. Zuliani, took the child to his bosom and bestowed his name upon her; so she's Miss Zuliani to this day. Unfortunately the mother didn't long survive her marriage, and I'm very much afraid that for some years, while Rupert was soldiering in India, Miss Zuliani was left to disport herself in the choicest available gutters.

PRINCESS.

Was no provision made for the poor little thing?

SIR GEORGE.

Ha! you wouldn't ask that if you were acquainted with Signor Zuliani. Oh, yes, and directly my brother came home he did his best to ensure the allowance being properly applied.

PRINCESS.

She is not ill-educated, then?

SIR GEORGE.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] She's so clever. Of course, she has been rather queerly influenced by the migrations of the various opera-troupes to which Mr. Zuliani and his 'cello have been attached. But even that has been education, of a sort. She's at home in every big city of Europe and America, and thinks and dreams, she says, in half-a-dozen languages.

PRINCESS.

When Captain Lamorant died, George, you ought to have——

SIR GEORGE.

I did. I promptly tore her from the weeping Zuliani, and she has been lately polishing at school, here, in England.

PRINCESS.

[*Rising.*] That's good of you. The man, Zuliani——?

SIR GEORGE.

Oh, he's now living in well-earned comfort where she left him, in New York. He has—h'm—retired.

PRINCESS.

Retired——?

SIR GEORGE.

Upon Miss Zuliani's allowance. *I* attend to that. [*She comes to him and gives him her hand.*] You see the position. The girl's a dainty, charming thing; and astoundingly artless, considering—. What on earth is to become of her?

PRINCESS.

Does she know the truth?

SIR GEORGE.

Oh, yes, *she* knows—and I have been obliged to tell our friends, the St. Roches. But, obviously, it's desirable not to label the poor child with her origin. She's a philosopher, though! The rascal will call me Uncle George, when we're alone, without the tremor of an eyelash.

PRINCESS.

[*Thoughtfully.*] And you think that I——?

SIR GEORGE.

I think it would be a blessed accident if Miss Zuliani were to fall into the hands of some good woman.

PRINCESS.

[*In a low voice, partly to herself.*] I wonder if this girl could be made to fill the blank in my life.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Quietly.*] She's Rupert's child. [*She gives him a quick look, then drops her eyes.*] See her.

PRINCESS.

I will, this evening. [*Going to the writing-table and sitting.*] Ring the bell twice. [*He rings the bell.*] I'll send a note to Mrs. St. Roche. I'll go to the theatre —[*suddenly*]—oh—! [*Rising.*] But—Isabel St. Roche—! Miss Zuliani is in *her* care.

SIR GEORGE.

[*In an altered tone.*] Yes, and I want to make other arrangements as soon as possible.

PRINCESS.

[*Surprised.*] Why?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Hesitatingly.*] You see, the rascal kicked at her school suddenly. For the moment I didn't know *how* to dispose of her——

PRINCESS.

This is ungrateful to Bella and her husband.

SIR GEORGE.

Horribly so. But I've been a great deal to Grosvenor Place during Miss Fay's visit there; and, for a young girl, the St. Roche *ménage*—[*with a wave of the hand*]—you know.

PRINCESS.

[*Wonderingly.*] No, I don't know.

[CATHERINE *appears.*

CATHERINE.

Madame?

PRINCESS.

A messenger, to take a note at once to Mrs. St. Roche. Wait, please.

[CATHERINE *retires.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Approaching the* PRINCESS.] May I come to you again to-morrow? I feel light-hearted at the mere idea——

PRINCESS.

And I—I am quite excited. [*Giving him her hand.*] Yes, to-morrow.

SIR GEORGE.

Princess, [*kissing her hand*] accept an old man's thanks.

PRINCESS.

Ah, George, an old woman is glad to serve you.

[*She sits again at her table, and is writing hurriedly as he goes out.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT.

The Scene represents the smoking-room and the billiard-room of a West-end London mansion. The stage is mainly occupied by the smoking-room; the billiard-room is seen through a wide arch on the left. The fireplace, where a bright fire is burning, is on the right. Beyond the fireplace, in the right-hand corner of the smoking-room, about eight feet above the floor level, is a door reached by a broad flight of steps, with a handsome balustrade, stretching out into the room. This is the principal entrance to the rooms. In the centre wall, but on the floor level, there is another door. Running obliquely on the left side is the arch, supported by pilasters, admitting to the billiard-room, which is reached by two or three steps. At the upper end of this room, which is well in sight of the spectator, are the marking-boards, cue-racks, and general fitments of a billiard-room, and a lounge seat. The billiard table itself is also partly seen. In the smoking-room are settees, small tables, chairs, and a circular ottoman. At the extreme back, against the wall, is a larger table, upon which stands a silver tray with decanters of spirits, glasses of all sizes, and bottles and siphons of aerated waters. Round the fireplace is a fender-seat. Statuettes bearing electric branches are disposed about the rooms.

It is night-time, and the rooms are brilliantly lighted.

SIR JAMES VELLERET—*a dried, careworn man of about fifty, in Levée dress—is standing in the centre of the room, shaking hands with* SIR GEORGE LAMORANT. *On his right is* RONALD ST. ROCHE, *a little, simple-*

looking, florid man, with a wrinkled brow, large, staring eyes, and an air of suppressed anxiety. Seated upon the settee are COLONEL ARTHUR EAVE *and the* HON. CHARLES DENSTROUDE. EAVE *is forty-eight, in appearance a typical soldier;* DENSTROUDE *is a handsome young man with a finely-chiselled, but expressionless, face, and of a generally calm exterior.* BARTLEY LEVAN *and* PERCEVAL ORD—*also modish young men, the latter especially foolish-looking—are to be seen moving about the billiard-table, playing billiards. Another young man,* ADRIAN MYLLS, *is leaning against the pilaster, pretending to watch the game, but really posing. In manner and dress he attempts to recall the graces peculiar to the period of the Regency. He wears a stock, a fob-chain, a high coat-collar, is wasp-waisted, and his trousers, which are broad across the hips, taper finely to his ankles. Some of the men are smoking. A Servant is in the billiard-room marking the game, and the click of the balls is heard.*

SIR JAMES.

[*Turning to* ST. ROCHE.] I am sorry I must run away.

ST. ROCHE.

My wife will be back from the theatre soon.

SIR JAMES.

Ah, I should like to have shaken hands with Mrs. St. Roche——

ST. ROCHE.

[*Ascending the steps with* SIR JAMES.] I wish the Speaker and his Levée at the dooce, my dear Sir James, I do really——

[*They go out. A peculiarly stupid, vacant laugh is heard from* ORD. SIR GEORGE *winces and puts his fingers in his ears.* DENSTROUDE *goes into the billiard-room.*

EAVE.

[*Joining* SIR GEORGE.] Perceval's laugh gets upon your nerves?

SIR GEORGE.

My dear Arthur, what possessed Ronald to bid these buzzing midges to the ceremony of saying good-bye to the broken butterfly?

EAVE.

Why should your final impressions be entirely of drowsy insects like myself?

[MYLLS *bestirs himself and takes snuff elegantly.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Eyeing* MYLLS, *drawing* EAVE *aside.*] Now, tell me, you who are, comparatively, of sound mind and body—does our friend Adrian there, for instance, cheer you?

EAVE.

[*Smiling.*] Rather amuses me, I own.

SIR GEORGE.

Upon whom, or on what, is he modelling himself now, in heaven's name? Last summer he was Napoleonic, and had a curl on his forehead, and was full of strategy.

EAVE.

He has been babbling incessantly on the Prince Regent, and of Brummell, for the past few weeks.

SIR GEORGE.

That explains his appearance to-night.

EAVE.

Napoleon—I remember. He's very inconstant. [ST. ROCHE *returns and descends the steps. There is another laugh from* ORD.] Ha, ha! Perceval's in fine form.

[*He goes into the billiard-room.* MYLLS *accompanies* EAVE, *putting an arm upon his shoulder.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*To* SIR GEORGE.] Velleret looks a bad colour, don't he?

SIR GEORGE.

His hue is somewhat pre-Raphaelite. What's his age—fifty something?

ST. ROCHE.

No, no—my age. Nine-and-forty.

SIR GEORGE.

Forty-nine or fifty-nine—what does it matter, after you're forty? Of course, Jimmy's a bad colour. I'm a bad colour; *you're* a bad colour; we're all a bad colour—— ! [ORD *laughs again;* SIR GEORGE *writhes.*] Gurrrh!

ST. ROCHE.

[*Poking the fire.*] My dear chap, you must forgive me—but you're wrong—[*putting a log on*] you're wrong. In fact, there's no doubt about it, you—you—you are damn out o' sorts.

SIR GEORGE.

Oh, that's true.

ST. ROCHE.

Just as some men get angry and see blood, you're walkin' about seein' wrinkles. Now, my dad was a parson, a leadin' light of the Church of England——

SIR GEORGE.

What's that to do with it, Ronny?

ST. ROCHE.

Oh, nothin'—exceptin' that I s'pose preachin' runs a bit in our family. At any rate, I feel bound to tell you, George, it's my deliberate opinion you—you—you—you're behavin' wicked.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Sitting on the ottoman, facing* ST. ROCHE, *humbly.*] I perceive—a sermon, oh, son of a gun—Canon! Canon St. Roche—your late father. A little joke, Ronny, and in the worst possible taste.

ST. ROCHE.

Ah, I wish you made more jokes of that sort now-a-days, dear feller. However, sermon or no sermon, your goin' away, and leavin' your native country, and hidin', and all that,—it's—it's—I must say it—my dear dad would have said it—it's damn feeble.

SIR GEORGE.

Of course it is. But what's the remedy?

ST. ROCHE.

[*Rubbing his brow anxiously and wearily.*] Against feelin' stale, and—and—and bothered, and generally finished?

SIR GEORGE.

Against feeling stale, and bothered, and generally finished.

ST. ROCHE.

I will tell you, George. It's a thousand pities you haven't come to me for advice before——. [*A Servant, carrying a small box, enters, and descends the steps, going towards the billiard-room.*] What's that?

SERVANT.

Mr. Levan's toys, sir—just arrived. His servant had took them to the wrong 'ouse.

[*The Servant goes into the billiard-room.*

ST. GEORGE.

Toys——!

ST. ROCHE.

Cert'nly. Bartley's got quite a craze for toys just now—has all the novelties from Paris and Vienna. And people like him to bring his toys to their houses.

SIR GEORGE.

Do they!

ST. ROCHE.

Oh, yes, just now people are wantin' to see Bartley's toys. *I* like him to bring 'em to *my* house.

SIR GEORGE.

Do you!

ORD.

[*In the billiard-room.*] Oh, look here! Bartley's toys have turned up! Ho, ho, ho! he, he!

ST. ROCHE.

Yes, and people are askin' Perceval out a great deal just now.

SIR GEORGE.

Are they!

ST. ROCHE.

Because Bartley's toys make Perceval laugh. Just now, people are wantin' to hear Perceval laugh. *I* want to hear Perceval laugh.

[*The Servant crosses the room again, and goes out.*

ORD.

[*In the billiard-room.*] Oh, I say, do look! Ha, ha, ha!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Hiding his face against the drum of the ottoman, in half-serious, half-assumed despair.*] Oh—h—h—h!

ST. ROCHE.

[*Laying a hand on* SIR GEORGE'S *shoulder.*] And now you know my method o' gettin' through life, George. Now you know my what-d'ye-call-it—my panacea for all the ills that flesh is heir to. If you have to grow old yourself, don't live with people who

continually remind you that your clock's runnin' down. As a matter o' fact, it's my wife's notion quite as much as my own We take precious good care to always have a lot of youngsters about us—men half my age; we live in an atmosphere of youth, gaiety, high spirits——

SIR GEORGE.

My dear Ronny, you don't believe I could bring myself to see any gaiety in this sort of racket, do you?

ST. ROCHE.

You used to find heaps o' fun in it.

SIR GEORGE.

Did I?

ST. ROCHE.

Did you!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Blankly.*] I suppose I did.

[*There is a yell of delight from* ORD. SIR GEORGE *starts to his feet, joining in the laugh, mirthlessly.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha! Whoop!

ST. ROCHE.

Good! fust class.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Relapsing into gloom.*] Youth—gaiety—high spirits—well, there is something in your idea. [*Lolling against the drum of the ottoman.*] Ronny, I often think that if, when I was a poor devil in the Colonial Office, I'd had the pluck to marry on a beggarly income, to marry some meek, unpretending girl; and could in these days have been amusing myself over sending a boy to Harrow, and in watching a little romp of a daughter——

ST. ROCHE.

Oh, no, dear feller! Dash it all, nothin' o' that sort!

SIR GEORGE.

Eh?

ST. ROCHE.

[*Perspiringly.*] Not marriage, dear feller, whatever you do! Phew!

SIR GEORGE.

[*With a laugh.*] Well, you're a nice married-man!

ST. ROCHE.

Oh, I don't mean to say that *I'm* not happily married, my dear boy. [*Painfully.*] Only, I'm one of the lucky ones. Marriage is a real good thing, when it comes off, don'-cher-know, [*with a gulp*] but——

SIR GEORGE.

[*Carelessly.*] Oh, for me the time's gone by, now.

ST. ROCHE.

You keep o' that mind, George. As I say, I—I'm one of the lucky ones, but I—I'm an exception, dear feller.

[*The Men come out from the billiard-room*; BARTLEY LEVAN *with his box of toys*, PERCEVAL ORD *following him gleefully.* LEVAN *deposits the box on a table, and, standing behind it, displays the toys.* ORD *sits on the settee;* MYLLS, *always attitudinizing and self-absorbed, arranges himself on the arm of the settee.* DENSTROUDE *and* EAVE *stand right and left of* LEVAN.

ST. ROCHE.

Anything noo, Bartley?

LEVAN.

I took two extraordinary German talking dolls to Tarlington House last night.

ORD.

I was there. Oh, those dolls made me laugh so!

EAVE.

Where are they?

LEVAN.

Lady Grace kept them.

ST. ROCHE.

Oh, confound——!

[LEVAN *has now distributed some of his toys—hideous spiders, clock-work rats, and various mechanical beasts and birds. The men—with the exception of* SIR GEORGE, *who looks on with staring eyes and open mouth—examine and work the toys, and are highly entertained. There is much talking and laughter.* ORD *rolls on the settee in ecstasy.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*Disappointed over an egg which should produce a chicken, but fails to do so.*] Here, I say! Mine's broken. Give me another.

[*He drags some other toys, and a velvet, embroidered fool's cap, out of the box; the fool's cap drops from his hand, falling at* SIR GEORGE'S *feet.*

DENSTROUDE.

What have you found?

ST. ROCHE.

[*Placing upon the floor, in front of the table, a swan drawing a dog-cart.*] Fust class! Look at this!

[*The Men bend forward eagerly to watch the swan, applauding its progress. Suddenly* SIR GEORGE *discovers the fool's cap, snatches it up, and puts it upon his head.*

SIR GEORGE.

Ha, ha, ha, ha! Wh-h-h-hoy!

[*The Men turn to him in surprise.*

ST. ROCHE.

Eh? what——! [SIR GEORGE *hops round the ottoman grotesquely. The Men laugh.*] That's right, dear feller —that's how we like to see you.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Partly in earnestness, partly in a spirit of mockery.*] My good friends, I have become conscious that I am a shocking wet-blanket to-night. I have made a poor return to old Ronny here, to all of you, for this farewell pat on the back you so kindly administer. But you know—Ronny knows—I've been in the blues lately, and in the doctor's hands. [*Taking a small phial from his waistcoat pocket.*] Look here! a dose of digestive medicine—I ought to have taken it immediately after dinner. [*Producing a pill-box from another pocket.*] A pill—to be swallowed at bed-time. It is past my prescribed bed-time now. [*Flinging both phial and pill box into the grate.*] To the devil with 'em? Ronny has imparted to me the true, the sovereign cure for all the ills and sins of life. It is to cultivate

the tastes, and to view the world with the eyes, of you light-hearted boys. [*Jumping on to the ottoman and seating himself upon the drum.*] I am with you—king of you! I call myself to the throne. Mylls, don't look so portentous and solemn—you will depress me. Levan, more toys! I command your laugh again, Perceval. Denstroude, you monopolize a most precious monkey upon a stick. [DENSTROUDE *hands him the toy.*] We thank you. [*They all laugh, humouring him.* EAVE *stands by the fire.*] Out with your treasures, Levan.

LEVAN.

Sorry—the box is empty.

SIR GEORGE.

Empty! *Empty?*

LEVAN.

Yes, [*taking out a collapsed air-ball, painted to resemble a human face, with a mouthpiece attached to it*] with the exception of this.

ST. ROCHE.

What's that?

LEVAN.

[*Trying, with only partial success, to blow out the air-ball.*] You have to inflate it—and it becomes a face—as you see—and then you allow the air to escape—and the face wrinkles and shrivels-up——

SIR GEORGE.

Wrinkles and shrivels-up——!

LEVAN.

[*Blowing.*] Confound the thing! And then it gives a despairing screech—and collapses—expires——

ORD.

[*Mournfully.*] Some beast stuck a toothpick in it last night. It won't go, Bartley.

LEVAN.

Awfully sorry—my favourite toy. [*Throwing the toy back into the box.*] It's a dead un.

SIR GEORGE.

A dead un. [*Grimly.*] Ha! already my reign is shadowed by evil. [*Taking off the fool's cap, and descending from his throne.*] Ronny, I abdicate.

ALL except MYLLS.

No, no!

SIR GEORGE.

I recognize a portent. The box is empty—except for the exceedingly uncomfortable emblem with which our friend has just entertained us. [*Resigning the cap and the monkey to* DENSTROUDE.] Charley, you rule in my stead—[*laying a hand upon his shoulder*] but even you may read a warning in the wrinkled features of Bartley Levan's favourite toy. Upon whom will all the susceptible women in London fix their affections—and how will *you* amuse yourself, eh?—when that smooth, inscrutable face of yours begins to wrinkle and shrivel-up?

DENSTROUDE.

[*Laughing softly.*] Ha, ha, ha!

SIR GEORGE.

Levan, the spirit of prophecy is upon me—beware the gout! There may come a time when, still carrying your box of playthings, you limp from house to house with feet encased in felt boots——!

EAVE, LEVAN, ORD.

[*In playful derision.*] Oh-h-h-h!

SIR GEORGE.

And when your merry laugh, Perceval, is checked by a rasping, irritating cough——!

ST. ROCHE.

Shut up, George!

EAVE, LEVAN.

Oh-h-h-h!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Turning to the fireplace.*] Rescue my pill from the ashes, Arthur. It is indispensable, I fear.

[EAVE *and* SIR GEORGE *have a playful struggle at the fireplace.*

ORD.

[*Referring to his watch.*] I say, Bartley, it's half-past eleven.

ST. ROCHE.

Don't hurry away. My wife will be home in a minute.

LEVAN.

Sorry, Ronny—I've promised to go on to the Raby.

ORD.

[*Rising.*] So have I.

[*The group breaks up.* DENSTROUDE *and* MYLLS *are together.* ST. ROCHE *assists* LEVAN *to replace the toys in the box, and then calls the Servant from the billiard-room, who takes the box and carries it off. While this is going on,* ORD *crosses to* SIR GEORGE, *and talks to him.*

ORD.

[*To* SIR GEORGE] I say, Lamorant. Upon my word, you know, I'm honestly sorry you're leavin' us.

SIR GEORGE.

Ah, my dear Perceval—— !

ORD.

What I want to say to you is this, you know. [*Awkwardly, with some feeling.*] I wish you'd always keep me posted in your movements.

SIR GEORGE.

I will.

ORD.

Because I should like to send you *Pick-Me-Up* every week. You might find a difficulty in gettin' it in Africa, or any of those places.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Taking his arm.*] Thanks.

ORD.

It's a dreadfully amusin' paper—never fails to make me almost yell.

[*They go up to* DENSTROUDE *and* MYLLS, *and are joined by* LEVAN. EAVE *comes forward.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*Meeting him.*] You're not off, too ?

EAVE.

[*Referring to his watch.*] My dear Ronny—— !

ST. ROCHE.

Dash the time! It bores my wife so, to come home and find me alone. [*Quickly.*] What I mean is——

EAVE.

Mrs. St. Roche will be fatigued——

ST. ROCHE.

Never fatigued, I assure you, when friends are here. Don't go, Arthur.

EAVE.

I won't.

ST. ROCHE.

[*Brightening.*] Fust class!

[ST. ROCHE *joins* LEVAN *and* ORD, *who have said farewell to* SIR GEORGE. *The three ascend the steps.* EAVE *crosses the room, wearing a thoughtful look.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*On the steps.*] You'll wait to see my wife, George, and Miss Zuliani?

SIR GEORGE.

With pleasure, if I may.

ST. ROCHE.

Good! [*To* DENSTROUDE.] You'll stop to see my wife, Charley?

DENSTROUDE.

[*Formally.*] Delighted.

ST. ROCHE.

Fust class! [*To* MYLLS.] Don't go, Adrian.

MYLLS.

[*Laboriously extracting his watch from his fob.*] I fear I must take my leave, dear friend.

ST. ROCHE.

Oh, no! confound——!

[ST. ROCHE *disappears, going after* LEVAN *and* ORD. DENSTROUDE *strolls into the billiard-room, and "knocks the balls about."* MYLLS *comes to* SIR GEORGE.

MYLLS.

[*Airily, to* SIR GEORGE.] I wish you an unendurable exile, dear friend. You apprehend the compliment?

SIR GEORGE.

Thanks, my dear Mylls.

MYLLS.

We have been jesting here to-night. Yet it struck me there was, at some moments, a strain of significance in our mirth.

SIR GEORGE.

So it struck me.

MYLLS.

And you seriously seek, dear jaded friend, a means of retaining the savour of life?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Smiling.*] You have the air of a discoverer.

MYLLS.

Dear Lamorant, believe me, you moderns lose your relish of things because of the extreme pettiness of your vices.

SIR GEORGE.

Really? You would suggest——?

MYLLS.

A return to the coarse, robust, elementary viciousness of our progenitors.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Slyly.*] Not of too remote a period?

MYLLS.

No. [*Passing his hand through his hair.*] I would go no further back than a particular period of the Georgian era.

SIR GEORGE.

The time of the Prince Regent, say——

EAVE.

And of Brummell.

SIR GEORGE, EAVE.

Ha, ha, ha!

MYLLS.

Rail on, gentlemen! [*Ascending the steps, gaily.*] Rail on—but, though I live to be ninety, I shall *live.*

SIR GEORGE, EAVE.

Come back, Mylls!

MYLLS.

Not I! I have a meeting to attend at a public-house near Shaftesbury Avenue. A few of us are attempting to organize a cock-fight in the cellar——

[*He goes out.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*At the foot of the steps.*] Ha, ha, ha! what is to be the next remedy?

EAVE.

Ha, ha! But it is a quaint notion, George—dressing-up to restore obsolete vices.

[*He strolls away, joining* DENSTROUDE *in the billiard-room.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*At a table, filling a tumbler from a siphon.*] As if vice ever alters! It is only in virtue that there are changes of fashion.

[FAY ZULIANI *appears at the top of the steps—a bewitching creature with a foreign air and foreign grace, and with an accent suggestive of many languages. She is in a theatre-cloak and hood, and carries a large bouquet. Her attitude towards* SIR GEORGE *is one of child-like reliance and confidence qualified by a strain of wilfulness; he, on his side, is partly amused and partly embarrassed by the semi-paternal character he is called upon to play.*

FAY.

[*Seeing* SIR GEORGE—*gladly.*] Ah—! [*She trips down the steps and joins him. He glances towards the billiard-room, putting a finger to his lips.*] Good ev-e-ning. Deed you tink ve should never return?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Smiling at her.*] Enjoyed yourself?

FAY.

Abbastanza bene—[*with a little shrug of the shoulders*] pretty vell, you know. [*Drawing back a step or two, to display herself.*] I look very—presentable, in your opinion? [*A pause.*] Say someting.

SIR GEORGE.

Oh, charming, my dear.

FAY.

Tank you. I tink it extremely kind of you to vait 'ere so late—to see me, eh?

SIR GEORGE.

And Mrs. St. Roche. What a fine bouquet you are carrying!

FAY.

[*Indifferently.*] Mr. Denstroude sent it to me.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Frowning.*] Mr. Denstroude? [*Looking towards the billiard-room again.*] He's there.

FAY.

[*Passing* SIR GEORGE.] I vill go and tank him prettily—to save myself de beastly fag of wr-r-riting a letter.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Severely.*] Not beastly fag, Fay. Where did you pick that up?

FAY.

At school—Miss Gordon's—v'ile I vas finishing. [*Slyly.*] 'Ardly lady-like, eh?

SIR GEORGE.

Not in the least lady-like.

FAY.

[*Making a grimace.*] You are too disagreeable to-night.

[*She runs into the billiard-room and joins* DENSTROUDE *and* EAVE. MRS. ST. ROCHE, *who also carries a bouquet, enters and comes down the steps, followed by the* PRINCESS PANNONIA, MRS. SABISTON, MRS. WARE, MAXIME DEMAILLY, *and* ST. ROCHE. MRS. WARE *is a curiously striking fair woman, of problematical age, with regular features, large lustrous eyes, and luxuriant golden hair rolled back from a broad, white brow. She is dressed in virginal white.* DEMAILLY *is a gallant-looking, handsome young Frenchman, of about nine-and-twenty, speaking English glibly, but with a slight accent. The Ladies are beautifully dressed, and are wearing their theatre-cloaks.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Shaking hands with* SIR GEORGE.] So pleased to find you here. I have begged the Princess and Mrs. Sabiston to come in for a few moments. [*To the* PRINCESS.] You have seen each other to-day already——

PRINCESS.

[*Smiling at* SIR GEORGE.] Yes.

[*The* PRINCESS *moves away and talks to* FAY, EAVE, *and* DENSTROUDE, *who appear on the steps leading from the billiard-room.* FAY *and* EAVE *assist the* PRINCESS *to remove her cloak.*

MRS. SABISTON.

[*Advancing to* SIR GEORGE.] How do you do?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

There were five acts to the play, and we are dying of thirst—at least, I am. Why is thirst so disreputable? But I have ordered some sandwiches, for the sake of appearances.

MRS. SABISTON.

[*Heavily.*] Sandwiches—ah, yes. To me, the drama is famishing work.

[MRS. SABISTON *joins the other group. She takes off her cloak and it is placed upon a chair.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Turning to* MRS. WARE *and* DEMAILLY, *who have by this time come forward.*] Mr. Demailly was at the theatre too—— [*To* SIR GEORGE.] Oh, do you know my friend Mr. Demailly—and Mrs.—Mrs.—? [*To* MRS. WARE.] Do forgive me! how stupid I am!

DEMAILLY.

Mrs. Ware.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*To* SIR GEORGE.] Mrs. Ware? [SIR GEORGE *looks at* MRS. WARE *in blank amazement; gradually a frown gathers upon his face.*] [*To* MRS. WARE *and* DEMAILLY.] Sir George Lamorant.

[*The introduction is formally acknowledged on both sides, then* DEMAILLY *and* MRS. WARE *talk to* ST. ROCHE. MRS. ST. ROCHE *turns from* SIR GEORGE *and encounters* EAVE, *who is encumbered with the* PRINCESS'S *cloak.* SIR GEORGE *moves behind the settee.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Shaking hands with* EAVE.] How do you do, Colonel Eave?

EAVE.

How do you do? I must deposit my most precious burden somewhere. May I take your cloak?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Laughing.*] No, thanks.

[*She turns to* MRS. WARE. EAVE *places the* PRINCESS'S *cloak over the back of the settee.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*To* EAVE, *quickly.*] Arthur! Arthur! Look at that woman!

EAVE.

Woman——?

SIR GEORGE.

Talking to Mrs. St. Roche.

EAVE.

[*Seeing* MRS. WARE.] Powers! how does *she* get here?

SIR GEORGE.

She is of the stained-glass window pattern to-night. Ronald doesn't recognize her, evidently.

EAVE.

Poor Mrs. St. Roche!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Seizing* EAVE'S *arm.*] My dear Arthur, this is simply infernal——!

[*He draws* EAVE *aside into the billiard-room.* MRS. ST. ROCHE *comes forward, unfastening her cloak at the throat.* ST. ROCHE *joins her.* DEMAILLY *the* PRINCESS, and MRS. SABISTON *talk together at the foot of the steps* FAY *joins* MRS. WARE, *and they sit, side by side, chatting, on the settee.* FAY *removes her own theatre-cloak;* MRS. WARE *retains hers.* DENSTROUDE *stands, eyeing* ST. ROCHE *and* MRS. ST. ROCHE. SIR GEORGE *and* EAVE *are now out of sight.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*To* MRS. ST. ROCHE—*his manner, with her, always timid and hesitating.*] I say, Bella——

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

What?

ST. ROCHE.

[*Offering to assist her.*] Shall I—er—undo that for you?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Irritably.*] Please don't fidget me. What do you want?

ST. ROCHE.

Who's this Mrs. What's-her-name?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

An acquaintance of Fay's. Fay has skated with her once or twice at the Rink, and taken a fancy to her—admires her—calls her the Madonna——

ST. ROCHE.

[*Dubiously.*] The Rink——

MRS ST. ROCHE.

It's quite right. Maxime introduced her to us——

ST. ROCHE.

[*Satisfied.*] Oh—— !

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

They were with a party in a box opposite ours, and Fay asked me to tell Maxime to bring her round.

[DENSTROUDE *has sauntered towards the settee. She perceives him; they exchange looks.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*After a glance at* MRS. WARE.] Yes, she does resemble a picture you pay a franc to see in a foreign church.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*To* ST. ROCHE, *in a cold, steady voice.*] Go and inquire after the sandwiches. Tell Biddulph, a large quantity.

ST. ROCHE.

A large quantity ?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Impatiently.*] For Edith—for Edith——

[*He goes away, meekly. She looks round the room, to assure herself that the attention of others is not upon her, then moves to the settee. She and* DENSTROUDE *talk together rapidly in soft, low tones.*

DENSTROUDE.

[*Behind the settee.*] How are you?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Tossing her bouquet on to the settee and taking off her cloak.*] As if you care!

DENSTROUDE.

What is wrong?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Throwing her cloak across the back of the settee.*] I hope Miss Zuliani has sufficiently thanked you for the bouquet you sent her to-night.

DENSTROUDE.

Quite.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

What a fool you are making of me!

DENSTROUDE.

I——!

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Or, rather, what a fool I have made of myself—to have this pretty young thing about me, to let you meet her here frequently, to let you contrast her, day by day, with a woman you are becoming sick-and-tired of——!

DENSTROUDE.

You're not well, dear; you're doing too much——

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Tearing at her gloves.*] Hah!

DENSTROUDE.

As for those paltry flowers—— [*She tumbles the bouquet to the floor and kicks it under the settee.*] As for those flowers, I thought it wise to send two bouquets to your box——

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Wise!

DENSTROUDE.

Prudent. You understand me perfectly well—the look of the thing——

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Oh, the "look of the thing," by all means! But for the future, send *me* no flowers. That removes the necessity for making floral offerings to any girl who happens to be staying in my house.

DENSTROUDE.

Sssh!

[SIR GEORGE *and* EAVE *come out from the billiard-room.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*To* EAVE.] Colonel Eave, be good-natured and open soda-water bottles for me——

[*She goes to the table followed by* EAVE *and* DENSTROUDE. *The further group is now composed of the* PRINCESS, MRS. SABISTON, DENSTROUDE, EAVE, MRS. ST. ROCHE, *and* DEMAILLY. *The popping of corks is heard at intervals.* SIR GEORGE *stands in front of the settee, impatiently watching* FAY *and* MRS. WARE, *who are still sitting together. He is about to advance towards them when the* PRINCESS *comes down to him.*

PRINCESS.

[*To* SIR GEORGE.] I love her!

SIR GEORGE.

This girl?

PRINCESS.

[*With a nod.*] I came home with Isabel in the hope of finding you here, so that I might tell you, before I go to sleep, that my heart has opened to her already and taken her in. Great heavens! the way in which Rupert looks at one out of her eyes!

SIR GEORGE.

My dear P'ncess, I—I kiss the ground you walk upon!

PRINCESS.

By the way, I am afraid I have been guilty of an inexcusable piece of diplomacy. [*Sitting and motioning him to be seated.*] What do you think I have done?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Sitting, on the settee, facing her.*] Miss Zuliani is the most fortunate young woman in the world!

PRINCESS.

You are not following me. I haven't told you—I go to Paris on Sunday, perhaps sooner. Madame de Trémorel has let me her house until the end of June. Well, I announced to them all this evening, in Mrs. St. Roche's box, that you have promised to be my guest for a few weeks.

SIR GEORGE.

[*In horror.*] Paris! Tombstones!

PRINCESS.

[*Gently*] Sssh, sssh, sssh! It was really unpremeditated. The thought flashed through me, and from me, that it was just the plan to enable you, in a plausible way, to settle your niece with me, and to satisfy yourself of her happiness in her new surroundings. And then—the pleasure of your society——

SIR GEORGE.

Ah——!

PRINCESS.

So now—I leave the rest to you.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Laughingly.*] You haven't left much to me!

PRINCESS.

I mean, the winning of Miss Zuliani's assent to our scheme—and without hurting Isabel St. Roche. Do you know, I am quieting my conscience with the idea that, for some reason, Isabel will not be very reluctant to part with Miss Zuliani?

SIR GEORGE.

Bella? Poor Bella is greatly attached to the child.

PRINCESS.

And yet to-night, when I asked Miss Zuliani, in a coldly friendly fashion, to visit me in Paris, it struck me that Bella St. Roche welcomed the suggestion eagerly.

[EAVE, *carrying a tumbler of sparkling water, approaches the* PRINCESS. *There is a general movement at this moment.* MRS. WARE *resigns her place on the settee beside* FAY *to* MRS. SABISTON, *and seats herself upon the ottoman. These three ladies are waited upon by* DEMAILLY, *who brings them soda-water, etc.* MRS. ST. ROCHE *sits listening, with an expressionless face, to* DENSTROUDE. ST. ROCHE *enters and descends the steps, followed by two Men-servants carrying sandwiches in*

silver dishes, plates, etc., which they hand round. Of the ladies, MRS. ST. ROCHE, FAY *and* MRS. SABISTON *eat; the rest decline.*

EAVE.

[*Behind the table to the* PRINCESS.] Princess, apollinaris——?

PRINCESS.

Thank you.

EAVE.

[*Placing the tumbler on the table.*] With ice in it?

PRINCESS.

Thanks.

EAVE.

Only ice——?

[*She nods and smiles.* EAVE *moves away and joins* MRS. SABISTON. FAY *leaves the settee, and again seats herself by* MRS. WARE.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Rising and standing near the* PRINCESS, *speaking to her in a low voice, and watching* MRS. WARE *and* FAY *as he talks.*] At any rate, my dear Princess, whatever Mrs. St. Roche's feelings may be in the matter, this girl shall be removed within the next few days. That I have quite resolved.

PRINCESS.

[*Looking up at him.*] What is it that makes you so determined? You were vague this afternoon. "For a young girl, the St. Roche *ménage*—" you said——

SIR GEORGE.

I admit that hitherto my reasons have been a little vague and undefined even to myself. But to-night St. Roche has cleared up a great deal that has been puzzling me in this house lately. He and his wife hold the dangerous theory that life may be made more endurable by throwing open their front door as wide as possible [*with a shrug of the shoulders*] to all the young gentlemen of their acquaintance.

PRINCESS.

Fie! Isn't this the prejudice of middle-age? Why is it so dangerous a theory?

SIR GEORGE.

Put it into practice and it, at least, demands a delicate process of selection to which dear old St. Roche is evidently unequal. For instance—who is the man who has come back with you from the theatre?

PRINCESS.

Mr. Demailly? Oh, Demailly is a secretary at the French Embassy here, I believe. I am inclined to like him.

SIR GEORGE.

Nevertheless, I suspect he ought to be kicked, Princess.

PRINCESS.

George——!

SIR GEORGE.

Am I right in assuming that he has presented this Mrs. Ware to you?

PRINCESS.

Yes. What about her? [*He shrugs his shoulders again. She looks, out of the corners of her eyes, at* MRS. WARE, *and then, steadily, at* SIR GEORGE.] What do you mean?

SIR GEORGE.

It makes my blood boil to see Fay thrown into the society of a woman of that class.

PRINCESS.

[*After a brief pause, rising, her tone changed.*] Get the child over to me, at once!

[*She seats herself on the settee.* SIR GEORGE *crosses to the fireplace, and stands eyeing* FAY *impatiently. After a little while she perceives him, rises and joins him.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*Coming forward.*] Nobody says anything about the noo play you've seen to-night. I suppose I ought to try and sit it out myself—[*to the* PRINCESS] but—ha—I hear it's rather a serious affair, Princess.

PRINCESS.

[*Absorbed.*] The play—? [*Rousing herself.*] Oh, I found it interesting. It set me thinking.

ST. ROCHE.

Thinking! oh, lor', I thought so! [*To* DEMAILLY.] What was the actin' like?

DEMAILLY.

Ah, I am very fond of everything English, of course—except your acting. The English cannot act, to save their life.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Brusquely.*] I don't agree with you.

DEMAILLY.

[*Politely.*] No?

ST. ROCHE.

Now, Miss Zuliani—[*with an execrable accent*] veuillez me donner votre opinion? Voilà l'opinion de la belle Franco-Italo-Américaine! Ha, ha!

FAY.

[*Crossing to the* PRINCESS, *casting a glance over her shoulder at* SIR GEORGE *as she goes.*] Pardon me, Sir George—I do agree vit Mr. Demailly. [*With a faint suggestion of mimicry.*] Your English actors and actresses are so—so—frigid, so—demure. [*Throwing her head back and laughing heartily.*] Ha, ha, ha! my Lord! vatever 'appens dey vill stick deir elbows to deir sides, and look—[*seating herself beside the* PRINCESS] genteel, do you say? If dey commit cr-r-rime on de stage, still you are sure dey are really extremely respectable. Dey murder vit de tips of deir fingers, as you might express it—[*breaking off, seeing that* SIR GEORGE *is looking at her crossly*] ah—! [*Staidly.*] I tink Sir George does not approve of young ladies creeticising so freely.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Hastily facing the fire, discomforted.*] H'm—ah—on the contrary!

MRS. SABISTON.

[*Eating sandwiches.*] I thought the scene of the dinner-party in the second act absolutely ridiculous.

DEMAILLY.

[*Turning to her.*] That pleased me very much—it was short.

MRS. SABISTON.

Short! certainly. They couldn't have been more than five minutes over dinner. Is it real food they eat upon the stage, can anybody inform me?

MRS. WARE.

[*In soft, measured tones.*] Oh, yes, real food of a kind. I once heard so.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Did you care for the play, Mrs. Ware?

MRS. WARE.

Not in the least. The story of the piece was most distasteful to me. [*With drooping eyelids.*] In my opinion, subjects of that character are quite unfit for the theatre.

[*She rises and moves toward* FAY *and the* PRINCESS, *as if to join them. Apparently without observing* MRS. WARE'S *intention, the* PRINCESS *rises and, with her arm through* FAY'S, *moves away with the girl, passing behind the settee, and joining* MRS. ROCHE *and* DENSTROUDE. MRS. WARE *complacently seats herself upon the settee;* DEMAILLY *goes to her and talks, bending over her.* MRS. SABISTON *and* EAVE *now join the further group. The Servants have withdrawn.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Who has been sitting, scowling, upon the fender-seat—jumps up.*] Pah!

ST. ROCHE.

[*Going to him.*] Eh? [*Looking into his face.*] Put out, dear feller, about anything?

SIR GEORGE.

Forgive me, Ronny. I am sure you will feel as indignant as I do—oh, more indignant, of course, if that's possible, for you are under your own roof——

ST. ROCHE.

Indignant? Cert'nly, George. What at?

SIR GEORGE.

This is a charming lady Mr. Demailly has dared to present to Mrs. St. Roche!

ST. ROCHE.

Lady—? Mrs. What's-her-name?

SIR GEORGE.

Ware.

ST. ROCHE.

Why, who the dooce——?

SIR GEORGE.

You've forgotten her—one of the women we found in Sackville Street that night——

ST. ROCHE.

Sackville Street——?

SIR GEORGE.

At that supper Grismond was kind enough to inflict upon us.

ST. ROCHE.

[*His eyes bolting.*] One of those—! It ain't! Which one?

SIR GEORGE.

The woman who poured the burgundy into the finger-bowls.

ST. ROCHE.

[*His hand to his brow.*] Good Ged! of course! What an ass I am! Dear feller, I'm exceedin'ly obliged to you. Oh, I say, this is too bad!

FAY.

[*Near the entrance to the billiard-room.*] Because I am fond of de table, you understand. I can steeplechase de white into de pool-basket and bring de red out. And sometimes I can make a cannon over a 'at. Vill you bring me a 'at? A 'at! Yes, I vill show you, vit pleasure.

FAYE.

A hat——

[*He runs up the steps and disappears.* FAY *leads the way into the billiard-room, followed by the* PRINCESS, MRS. SABISTON, *and* DENSTROUDE. MRS. WARE *rises, passes behind the settee, and stands leaning against the pilaster,*

looking into the billiard-room. DEMAILLY *joins her.* MRS. ST. ROCHE *is also moving towards the billiard-room when* ST. ROCHE, *going to her in great perturbation, calls her.*

ST. ROCHE.

Bella!

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Turning to him.*] What—— ?

ST. ROCHE.

[*Motioning to her to follow him.*] I—I—I—I—. I say, Isabel!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Quietly.*] Not now, Ronny.

ST. ROCHE.

[*To* MRS. ST. ROCHE.] D-d-d-do you know what we've got in the house?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Eyeing him coldly.*] What we have in the house?

ST. ROCHE.

Yes—a rum un.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

I wish you could be a little less vulgar, Ronald. Explain yourself.

ST. ROCHE.

I beg your pardon. This Mrs. Ware—Lamorant knows her.

SIR GEORGE.

No, no!

ST. ROCHE.

Recognizes her. One of the m-m-most infamous women in London! A—a—a—a shockin' bad lot, to put it plain.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Surely you don't mean that!

ST. ROCHE.

Don't I!

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*With sincerity.*] Oh, George, if this is the case, it is too horrible. I am—sincerely sorry.

[EAVE *returns, carrying two hats—a felt hat and an opera hat—and goes into the billiard-room.*

EAVE.

[*As he descends the steps.*] Hat!

FAY.

[*In the billiard-room.*] A 'at! yes, on de table! la!

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

She has told dear Fay the most pathetic story of the loss of her husband, a Missionary preacher, in Japan——

[DEMAILLY *comes to* MRS. ST. ROCHE, *his cigarette case in his hand.*

DEMAILLY.

[*To* MRS. ST. ROCHE.] No one is smoking. Have I permission—— ?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*With dignity, drawing her skirts away from him.*] Maxime—Mr. Demailly—— !

[*She passes him, and joins those who are round the billiard-table.*

DEMAILLY.

[*Simply, looking after her.*] I—I am afraid I have offended Mrs. St. Roche.

ST. ROCHE.

Offended Mrs. St. Roche ! Yes, and you've offended me, dear feller—and Sir George here. I—I—I can't have this, you know !

DEMAILLY.

You cannot have this—— ?

ST. ROCHE.

This sort o' thing goin' on—under my own roof, as Sir George puts it——

DEMAILLY.

[*Looking at* SIR GEORGE.] As Sir George puts it?

ST. ROCHE.

[*Spluttering.*] In the presence of my wife, and my wife's dearest friends—most refined women—and *my* friends, gentlemen with—with—with—honourable notions of—of—of conduct! At first, I didn't recognize the lady—didn't recognize her.

DEMAILLY.

The lady? Mrs. Ware, are you speaking about?

ST. ROCHE.

Cert'nly. But d'rectly Sir George reminded me—oh, it's atrocious, dear feller!

DEMAILLY.

Reminded you——?

ST. ROCHE.

'Pon my soul, I can't imagine what the dooce you mean by it! It—it—it—it——!

DEMAILLY.

[*Calmly, but with a frown upon his face.*] But wait a moment—— [*There are murmurs and some slight sounds of applause from the billiard-room.* DEMAILLY *goes to* MRS. WARE *and touches her upon the arm; then, in response to a look from him, she follows him as he comes forward.*] St. Roche—[*to* SIR GEORGE, *who makes a movement*]—ah, I must request Sir George Lamorant not to go away!—St. Roche, I have been waiting for an opportunity of speaking a word or two privately to Mrs. St. Roche, and to you also, this evening. Naturally, I wish you and Mrs. St. Roche, to whom I am indebted for great kindness, to be among the first to know that it is my happiness to be engaged to be married to Mrs. Ware.

[*There is a moment's silence, which is disturbed by another ripple of applause from the billiard-room.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*Helplessly, to* MRS. WARE.] Er—ah—exceedingly fond of Maxime—my wife and myself. Er—of course, we hope you will both be—ahem!——

DEMAILLY.

[*To* ST. ROCHE.] St. Roche, will you be good enough to take Mrs. Ware to her carriage? [*To* MRS. WARE.] I will come to you in a minute.

[*With an uneasy little cough,* ST. ROCHE *offers his arm to* MRS. WARE; *she accepts it. Then she turns to* SIR GEORGE, *and, with a curious*

blink of the eyes, bows to him in a manner which is a blend of grace and impudence. SIR GEORGE *bows in return.* ST. ROCHE *escorts* MRS. WARE *to the foot of the steps, makes way for her to ascend, and follows her out.* DEMAILLY *remains standing, looking at* SIR GEORGE, *who, after another pause, advances.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*In a low voice.*] Mr. Demailly, I—I am extremely sorry. But——

[*He breaks off, with a polite gesture.*

DEMAILLY.

[*Between his teeth.*] You have been making gossip—scandal—to Mr. St. Roche concerning the lady who has just left the room.

SIR GEORGE.

As St. Roche was about to tell you—I recalled to his mind the circumstance of our having met Mrs. Ware on a certain occasion.

DEMAILLY.

And Mrs. St. Roche? When I interrupted, by asking Mrs. St. Roche whether I might be permitted to smoke, you were taking Mrs. St. Roche into the confidence, eh?

[SIR GEORGE *is silent.*

DEMAILLY.

Eh?

[SIR GEORGE *bows. Again there is a pause; then* DEMAILLY *turns to the table and, seizing the tumbler of water which he finds there, flings the contents full at* SIR GEORGE. *For a moment the two men confront each other steadily, without movement. The sudden sound of the click of the billiard-balls, and of another murmur of applause, relaxes the tension.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Glancing toward the billiard-room.*] Ah—! I can't thrash you here. [SIR GEORGE *produces his handkerchief and, coolly and methodically, wipes the water from his face and shirt-front, and then he buttons his coat across his breast.*] I shall seize, I assure you, an early opportunity of resuming this acquaintanceship—taking it up at the precise point at which we now break off.

DEMAILLY

[*With a return to frigid politeness.*] The sooner, the better. [*There is a break-up of the group at the billiard-table, with the sound of animated talk.*] For the present, I leave you to continue your—your tittle-tattle to the ladies.

[*He bows to* SIR GEORGE, *ascends the steps and departs.* SIR GEORGE *goes quickly to the further table, takes up a siphon of soda-water and a tumbler, and returns with them to the*

nearer table on the left. The various persons leave the billiard-room. The PRINCESS *puts on her cloak, aided by* DENSTROUDE. EAVE, *carrying his crush hat under his arm, assists* MRS. SABISTON *with her cloak;* MRS. ST. ROCHE *stands by them, talking to them.* FAY *comes to* SIR GEORGE.

FAY.

[*To* SIR GEORGE.] Sir George, vy did you not vatch me at de table v'ile I vas—vat 'ave you done to yourself?

SIR GEORGE.

Laughingly, playing with the siphon.] Drenched myself with this thing—there it goes again!

FAY.

My Lord! I am very sorry!

PRINCESS.

[*Coming to* FAY.] Good-night, Miss Zuliani.

FAY.

Good-night, Princess.

PRINCESS.

[*Holding* FAY'S *hand, looking into her eyes.*] I am so glad to know you.

FAY.

T'ank you.

PRINCESS.

[*Turning to* SIR GEORGE.] Good-night. [*In a low voice.*] To-morrow at eleven.

SIR GEORGE.

Good-night, Princess.

[*The* PRINCESS *goes to* MRS. ST. ROCHE; *they are joined by* DENSTROUDE. FAY *fetches her cloak and her bouquet from the settee.* MRS. SABISTON *and* EAVE *come to* SIR GEORGE.

MRS. SABISTON.

[*Shaking hands with* SIR GEORGE.] Let us see you before you leave London.

SIR GEORGE.

Of course. Good-night.

MRS. SABISTON.

Perhaps you'll come and eat.

SIR GEORGE.

Delighted.

[*She turns up the stage and meets* FAY; *they talk.*

EAVE.

[*To* SIR GEORGE.] Are you going to walk—? [*Surprised at his appearance.*] Hullo!

SIR GEORGE.

[*In an undertone.*] My dear Arthur! what do you think! I've got to horse-whip a man!

EAVE.

You—!

SIR GEORGE.

Oh, the most ludicrous mess! Yes, come home with me.

[EAVE *nods and, with* MRS. SABISTON, *joins the group at the foot of the steps.* FAY, *her cloak upon her arm, and carrying her bouquet, comes to* SIR GEORGE. ST. ROCHE *appears at the top of the steps. One by one, the* PRINCESS, MRS. SABISTON *and* EAVE *bid good-night to* MRS. ST. ROCHE *and* DENSTROUDE, *and depart, preceded by* ST. ROCHE.

FAY.

[*Softly, to* SIR GEORGE.] Good-night, uncle George.

SIR GEORGE.

[*To her, in a low voice, a little sternly.*] Be in to-morrow afternoon at three. I shall want to see you.

FAY.

[*Apprehensively.*] Ah—! you are not going to say good-bye to-morrow?

SIR GEORGE.

No, no, no—not to-morrow.

FAY.

[*Brightening.*] Only to scold me for someting. Good!

SIR GEORGE.

You were right. I don't like to hear you, or any young lady, boldly airing opinions before older people.

FAY.

I knew. I vatched your face. But I vas r-r-rolling along—I could not stop myself, you understand.

SIR GEORGE.

And these tricks on the billiard-table! Where did you pick those up?

FAY.

A man taught me in New York, in the hotel ve boarded at. 'E took great pains vit me.

SIR GEORGE.

Pah!

FAY.

[*Looking at him under her eyelashes.*] Not lady-like, you tink ?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Out of temper.*] Oh—!

FAY.

H'm ! not q'vite lady-like—eh ?

SIR GEORGE.

No, indeed.

FAY.

[*Penitently.*] I am so angry vit myself. I vill not do dese tings any more.

SIR GEORGE.

Ah, don't !

FAY.

[*Sighing.*] Good-night.

SIR GEORGE.

There, there ! Good-night, you—you—you rascal. Sleep well.

FAY.

[*With a nod and a smile.*] Alvays, alvays sleep vell. [*She gives him a final nod, and leaves him. Shaking hands*

with DENSTROUDE.] Good-night. [*Holding up her bouquet.*] Tanks, again. [*Kissing* MRS. ST. ROCHE.] Good-night, Mrs. St. Roche.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Good-night, dear child.

[FAY *runs lightly up the steps and disappears.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. ST. ROCHE, *who is now by the ottoman.*] I may come in to-morrow afternoon?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Do. [*With a little deprecatory gesture.*] I hope you have had a pleasant evening.

SIR GEORGE.

Charming—charming. [*Shaking hands with* DENSTROUDE.] Good-night.

DENSTROUDE.

Good-night.

[SIR GEORGE *descends the steps and goes out. As if oblivious of* DENSTROUDE'S *presence* MRS. ST. ROCHE *crosses to the settee and takes up her cloak.*

DENSTROUDE.

[*Coming to her side.*] Good-night, dear.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Turning to him, coldly.*] Good-night.

DENSTROUDE.

Come, come! be amiable—! [*Giving a hasty glance at the door, he lays his hand upon her shoulder, as if about to draw her to him.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Pushing him from her, angrily.*] No, no—certainly not.

[*With an impatient toss of the head, he turns away and ascends the steps.*

DENSTROUDE.

[*On the steps, pausing and looking back.*] You cycle at Battersea to-morrow morning?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

It's extremely unlikely.

DENSTROUDE.

I shall be there at ten. Don't be later.

[*He kisses his hand to her and departs. She stands quite still, thinking. A Servant enters, crosses to the billiard-room, and proceeds to cover up the billiard-table. She walks slowly to the otto-*

man and sits, looking into the fire. ST. ROCHE *re-appears and comes down the steps. She does not turn her head. He goes to the table and mixes some spirits and water.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*As he mixes the drink.*] What d'ye think—what d'ye think that silly, infatuated feller's goin' to do?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Demailly?

ST. ROCHE.

[*Glancing toward the billiard-room.*] Sssh! [*With a nod.*] Um!

[*He comes to her, bringing her the tumbler in which he has mixed the drink.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Taking the tumbler, her eyes never meeting his.*] Well, what is he going to do?

ST. ROCHE.

Marry that low woman.

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Callously.*] Great heavens! the fool!

ST. ROCHE.

Yes. Shockin', ain't it?

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Putting the glass to her lips, with a languid air.*] She has blinded him, I suppose, with some story or other; or he would hardly have committed the outrage, to-night, of presenting her to me.

ST. ROCHE.

[*Returning to the table and mixing a drink for himself.*] That's it—blinded him. And yet it's almost incomprehensible how a feller can be as blind as all that. Why, the very man-in-the-street——

[*The Servant switches-off the lights in the billiard-room, and comes out from the room.*

ST. ROCHE.

[*To the man.*] I'll switch the lights off here.

[*The Servant goes out.*

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

Well, you had better let him know that he mustn't attempt to come to this house again.

ST. ROCHE.

Poor chap!

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

We can't be associated, however remotely, with such a disgraceful connection.

ST. ROCHE.

Of course, of course. [*Coming down, glass in hand.*] I could tell you things I've heard about this Mrs. Ware——

MRS. ST. ROCHE.

[*Rising.*] Please don't! I want no details concerning a person of her world.

[*She ascends the steps slowly, carrying her cloak and her tumbler—without looking back.*

Good-night.

ST. ROCHE.

[*With a wistful glance at her.*] Good-night.

[*She departs. He stands for a little while contemplating space; then he switches-off the light. The room remains partially illumined by the fire-glow. He turns to examine the fire. Apparently assured on that point, he walks, still carrying his tumbler, to the door which is in the centre wall; where, uttering a little sigh as he opens the door, he disappears.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT.

The Scene is a spacious, richly-decorated room in a house in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées at Paris. At the back are three windows, draped with curtains, and having silk blinds, but the blinds are up and the curtains drawn aside. These windows, outside which jalousies are fixed, open on to a gravelled fore-court, enclosed by high railings, over which ivy is trained, while some shrubs and a few dwarf trees are growing there. Beyond the railings is a view of houses situated on the south side of the Avenue. Right and left there are double doors leading to other apartments. Between the two entrances, on the left, but standing out a few feet from the wall, is a statue of Cupid with bow and arrow, a bank of flowers surrounding the pedestal of the statue.

The time is evening. The room is brilliantly lighted by electricity, and the incandescent gas-lamps burn brightly in the Avenue.

The upper doors are open.

[LADY RINGSTEAD, LADY CHICHELE, *and* MRS. UGHBROOK *are seated on the right. In the window-recess,* BLANCHE ORIEL *and* FAY *stand talking together earnestly.* MADAME YANOKOFF *and* MRS. MARSH *are sitting on a settee, while the* PRINCESS *occupies the chair facing them, her back to the audience.* ANNIS *is sitting alone on a settee. With the exception of* MRS. MARSH, BLANCHE, FAY, *and* ANNIS—*who are dressed merely for dinner—the ladies are* en grande toilette *and wear*

their jewels. Two Servants hand coffee and retire. Just outside the open doors, on the right, four musicians, in a bright uniform, are playing stringed instruments. After the Servants have handed the coffee, the music ceases.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

And with me also, Winnifred. This will be the first function at the Élysée I shall have attended since I was here with poor Ringstead in 'seventy-eight. But I remember——

[*The* PRINCESS *now comes to the group on the right, her face is pale, her eyes are bright and restless.* MRS. UGHBROOK *rises; the* PRINCESS, *by a gesture, asks her to remain seated.*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

I was about to recall, Laura, that when I last went to the Élysée I had not dined beforehand so delightfully as you have enabled me to do to-night. Your uncle's rheumatism—do you feel well ?

PRINCESS.

I—— ?

MRS. UGHBROOK.

May I get you some salts ?

PRINCESS.

Don't trouble, dear Mrs. Ughbrook. [*Sitting, in the chair vacated by* MRS. UGHBROOK.] Thanks. I am perfectly well.

[MRS. UGHBROOK *joins* BLANCHE *and* FAY.

LADY CHICHELE.

Certainly, it was a charming thought of yours, dear Laura, to let us dine in this way before going on.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

But you have a little overtaxed yourself to-day, I fear.

PRINCESS.

[*Playing with her fan.*] Will you be vexed if I ask you to go to the Elysée without me?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Laura!

LADY CHICHELE.

You will disappoint so many!

PRINCESS.

[*With a smile.*] Hardly.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

This is that neuralgia again! Now, my dear Laura, radical measures must be taken with regard to this neuralgia of yours.

LADY CHICHELE.

Yesterday the English chemist in the Rue Castiglione was showing me a wonderful American nerve-cure. It is called—[*at a loss*] there now!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

It might cure American neuralgia.

LADY CHICHELE.

I wonder whether Edward remembers the name of the stuff. When the gentlemen join us, I'll ask him. Edward was in the shop at the time, buying scent——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Scent! for his own use?

LADY CHICHELE.

I gathered so—Frangipani.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Frangipani!

LADY CHICHELE.

Why not, dear Mary?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Winnifred—Laura—something has happened to Edward.

[*The* PRINCESS *turns her head away and stares at the parquet.*

LADY CHICHELE.

Happened?

LADY RINGSTEAD.

This morning I put a question to him as to when this most pretentious of comedies, the International Conference, is likely to conclude its dreary proceedings. His reply was—what do you think? [LADY CHICHELE *shakes her head.*] Gazing in a most irritating way into space, he expressed a wish that the Conference might find it necessary to extend its sittings. I demanded his reason. "Because Paris is so satisfying." Paris! a city I have heard him describe as one vast casino! Have you remarked, too, the general change in his appearance?

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] Well, now you——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Laura, you have seen a great deal of Edward lately —you must have been struck by the alteration.

PRINCESS.

I am afraid I am unobservant.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Morning and afternoon, never without a flower in his coat! That can't have escaped you. And, as I was saying to Blanche before dinner, there are his collars——

LADY CHICHELE.

But, Mary, you used to regret a certain lack of outward smartness in Edward——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

I admit it, but between that and foppishness——

LADY CHICHELE.

Foppishness!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Frangipani!

[*The musicians play again.* BLANCHE *sits with* MRS. UGHBROOK. FAY *crosses to* MRS. MARSH *and* MADAME YANOKOFF. *The Servants collect the coffee-cups and withdraw. During the progress of the music, the* PRINCESS *leaves* LADY RINGSTEAD *and* LADY CHICHELE, *and goes to* BLANCHE *and* MRS. UGHBROOK. BLANCHE *resigns her place on the settee to the* PRINCESS *and joins* LADY RINGSTEAD *and* LADY CHICHELE, *standing behind their chairs. As the music reaches its finale,* FAY *comes to* ANNIS.

FAY.

[*Softly.*] Vell, leetle mouse!

ANNIS.

[*Nervously.*] Oh, Fay!

FAY.

V'y don't you r-r-run about, leetle mouse?

ANNIS.

I wish the Princess hadn't been so kind as to ask me to come downstairs after dinner. I told mother how it would be.

FAY.

And 'ow is it?

ANNIS.

I am half dead with nervousness. The gentlemen come in soon—that's the next thing, isn't it?

FAY.

Yes, dat is de nex' 'orrible ting.

ANNIS.

Which of them took you in to dinner?

FAY.

Colonel Eave.

ANNIS.

Nice, was he?

FAY.

'E bored me.

ANNIS.

Bored you!

FAY.

My Lord, 'e bored me till I felt my scalp quivering! Do you know dat feeling?

ANNIS.

No.

FAY.

You vill some day. Oh, yes, dere are men alive who make your skull shr-r-rink, dey talk so foolishly. [*With a movement.*] And I vanted to be left to myself dis ev-e-ning, and de 'ouse to be q'vite quiet, so dat I might carry out my leetle plans vid'out difficulty. Annis, poor Fay 'as a gr-r-reat deal on 'er mind.

ANNIS.

Dear, what is it?

FAY.

[*Sitting near* ANNIS.] Dis R-r-r-reception at de stupid Élysée 'appening to-night—dis night of all nights! People returning 'ome at 'eaven knows vat hour! [*Pathetically.*] Oh, my plans, my plans!

ANNIS.

But what plans? Can I help you?

FAY.

Yes, rather. Dat is vat I 'ave come to ask you. [*Mysteriously.*] Annis, directly dey 'ave all started, and de servants 'ave put out dese lights, you must

creep downstairs and vait for me 'ere, v'ere you are, in the dark—vait till I join you, till I turn up, you understand.

ANNIS.

[*Breathlessly.*] Fay, are you up to any more mischief?

FAY.

[*With a nod and a little sigh.*] Alvays, alvays up to mischief.

ANNIS.

Oh—!

FAY.

Come! you vill do dis, and I vill pr-r-ray for you, Annis.

ANNIS.

I have cleared you from several scrapes already, by doing underhand things. I hate it! Supposing I refuse to assist you any more?

FAY.

[*Rising, her eyes flashing.*] Den I vill not pray for you, you vicked girl! [*The gentlemen are now appearing.*] 'Ere are de gentlemen, serve you right.

ANNIS.

[*Quickly.*] I'll be here.

FAY.

[*Squeezing* ANNIS'S *hand.*] Che Dio te lo renda!

KARA PASHA *and* COUNT REVICZKY, SIR ROBERT CHICHELE *and* SIR GEORGE LAMORANT, COLONEL UGHBROOK *and* GENERAL YANOKOFF, COLONEL EAVE *and* EDWARD ORIEL *enter.* KARA *is a portly Turk in the full dress of an officer of the Ottoman army, much decorated.* REVICZKY, *who is also elaborately decorated, wears the Hungarian Diplomatic uniform.* SIR ROBERT CHICHELE—*a fierce-looking, bald old gentleman of fifty-five—is in ordinary evening dress, but is decorated with the badge and star of the Bath.* YANOKOFF *wears the full dress of a General of the Russian army.* UGHBROOK *is in simple evening dress adorned with the C.B. badge.* SIR GEORGE, EAVE *and* EDWARD ORIEL *are also in plain evening dress. In* EDWARD'S *case the change to which* LADY RINGSTEAD *has alluded is apparent. A low collar worn in his previous dress has given place to a high one, and his clothes are now fashionably and elegantly cut.* KARA PASHA, *bowing to* LADY CHICHELE *in apology as he passes her, approaches* LADY RINGSTEAD.

KARA.

Lady Ringstead——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Rising.*] Ainsi vous vous souvenez-de moi.

KARA.

Le souvenir appartient aux hommes. Il en tue plus que le fer.

[*She taps his arm with her fan; they sit together on a settee.* REVICZKY *advances to the* PRINCESS; BLANCHE *talks to* SIR GEORGE. FAY *joins a group of the men.* SIR ROBERT *comes to* LADY CHICHELE.

SIR ROBERT.

H'm! Winnie——

LADY CHICHELE.

Now, Bob dear, what have I told you?

SIR ROBERT.

But I have seen nothing of you all day, Winnie!

LADY CHICHELE.

[*In a flutter.*] I cannot, will not, allow you to—to—to pay me attention. It is most embarrassing, Bob. You—you—you positively ought to know better.

SIR ROBERT.

Consider the length of time we have been apart.

LADY CHICHELE.

That's it! What on earth do people think? Pray remember, when we accepted Laura's invitation you gave me a solemn promise——

SIR ROBERT.

[*Sitting beside her, surreptitiously laying his hand upon hers.*] I cannot adhere to that condition any longer.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Snatching her hand away.*] Bob, get up!

SIR ROBERT.

Never!

LADY CHICHELE.

You make me blush! [*Rising.*] I thought soldiers were men of honour!

[*She leaves him and sits beside* ANNIS. SIR ROBERT *looks after her disconsolately. A musician detaches himself from his fellows and plays a melody upon the violin. There is an almost general change of position.* FAY *and* MADAME YANOKOFF *sit with* SIR ROBERT. REVICZKY *seats himself beside the* PRINCESS, *on a settee.* YANOKOFF *sits, in a chair, by them.* MRS. MARSH *and* BLANCHE *are together, on another settee.* UGHBROOK *is facing them, in a chair.* MRS. UGHBROOK *sits in the armchair;* SIR GEORGE *stands by her, above the chair, and* EAVE *by* MRS. MARSH. EDWARD *stands in the window recess, his eyes upon the* PRINCESS. *At the finish of the violin-solo, after some slight applause, there is another general movement, the signal for which is the rising of the* PRIN-

CESS *and* REVICZKY. *With the exception of* LADY CHICHELE, *who has become lost in thought, and of* SIR ROBERT, *who is gazing at her mournfully, all rise.* ANNIS *joins her mother—the seat beside* LADY CHICHELE *is therefore vacant;* SIR ROBERT *crosses to* LADY CHICHELE *and takes it.*

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Hastily rising.*] Robert, how dare you!

[*She moves away followed by* SIR ROBERT. *The musicians have disappeared, and the* PRINCESS *is standing in the doorway shaking hands with her guests who are taking their leave. While this is going on,* EAVE *slips his arm through* SIR GEORGE'S *and they talk apart.*

EAVE.

[*To* SIR GEORGE.] At last I've secured you.

SIR GEORGE.

You saw me struggling to get to you directly the ladies withdrew. Phew! Chichele held me fast by a button, to assure me, with a wealth of detail, that Lady Chichele is one of the most charming women in the world. [*With a change of tone.*] Well, my dear Arthur, you and the indefatigable de Polignac have concluded the preliminaries?

EAVE.

They were settled late this afternoon, at Laurent's.

SIR GEORGE.

Fontenay or Courbevoie? Where is the meeting to take place?

EAVE.

At Fontenay, at a spot half-way between the Lac des Minimes and the ladies' school on the south side of the railway station.

SIR GEORGE.

To-morrow morning?

EAVE.

An hour before daybreak. Get to bed soon, George.

SIR GEORGE.

Oh, I sha'n't be ten minutes at the Élysée to-night. Have you arranged for a carriage?

EAVE.

De Polignac and I will be waiting for you, with a carriage, at the corner of the Rue la Boëtie, at a quarter-past five.

SIR GEORGE.

Thanks.

EAVE.

What have you decided to do about the Princess?

SIR GEORGE.

To hold my tongue. The word "duel," to a woman, suggests all sorts of horrors.

EAVE.

Perhaps you're wise.

[*The guests have now gone, except* LADY RINGSTEAD *and* BLANCHE. *At this point the* PRINCESS *disappears, with* BLANCHE *and* LADY RINGSTEAD, *her arm round* BLANCHE'S *waist. After a moment or two,* MRS. MARSH, ANNIS, *and* FAY *stroll away, following the* PRINCESS, *leaving the two men alone.*

SIR GEORGE.

Besides, such an escapade while under her roof—! I fervently hope she'll never hear of it. Of course I shall leave a letter behind me, to be given her in case——

EAVE.

[*Wincing.*] Forgive me, old fellow—is an apology out of the question?

SIR GEORGE.

I shall be very happy to receive Mr. Demailly's.

EAVE.

Demailly can scarcely apologize for your having broken your walking-stick across his shoulders.

SIR GEORGE.

[*With a laugh.*] That's true. [*Laying a hand on* EAVE'S *shoulder.*] But don't be in the least anxious, my dear Arthur. Accidents seldom occur in these affairs. And as regards this particular affair, I am convinced Demailly himself would be just as remorseful if his bullet chanced to graze my coat-sleeve as I should be were I so unfortunate as to wing an angel when I fire into the sky.

EAVE.

[*Pulling at his moustache.*] I dare say you're right.

SIR GEORGE.

[*With animation.*] Ho, I've pictured it all! I see myself with turned-up coat-collar taking my twelve paces, for all the world like a British police-constable upon his beat. I hear de Polignac's high, nasal voice giving the signal—the sound is suggestive of Punch. Then there are two sharp reports; a few sluggish school-girls turn heavily in their beds, and Demailly and I walk off in opposite directions—I to the enjoyment of quite a decent breakfast at the little restaurant of the Porte Jaune. No, my dear friend, the worst aspect of to-morrow morning's grotesque parade is its utter, wilful absurdity.

EAVE.

Absurd! you may well say so.

SIR GEORGE.

But there, everything is absurd when you've turned forty. [*The* PRINCESS *returns with* MRS. MARSH, ANNIS, *and* FAY.] Say good-night to your hostess and come upstairs with me for a few moments. The Princess has placed the most charming little salon at my disposal—and I have another startling letter from New York to read to you.

EAVE.

Concerning Miss Zuliani?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Throwing up his hands.*] Toujours Zuliani!

[EAVE *goes to the* PRINCESS. *At the same moment,* FAY *comes to* SIR GEORGE.

FAY.

[*In a whisper.*] Uncle George, poor leetle Annis Marsh is dying to see de vater-ballet at de Cirque.

SIR GEORGE.

Dying, is she? That's very sad.

FAY.

And ve cannot get anybody to take us, you understand.

SIR GEORGE.

We!

FAY.

[*After a sly little laugh.*] Mrs. Marsh shuts her eyes at de mention of de circus, and de Princess—[*shrugging her shoulders*] vell, she is continually in de clouds, you know.

SIR GEORGE.

If my grey hairs found favour with the authorities, it would give me the greatest possible pleasure——

FAY.

Oh, you are a good-'earted man!

SIR GEORGE.

My days in Paris are numbered, but perhaps there is a matinée early next week——

FAY.

Ye-e-es, a matinée is de proper ting for young ladies, is it not?

SIR GEORGE.

Certainly.

FAY.

[*With outstretched fingers and a very wry face.*] My Lord! alvays matinée, matinée, matinée!

[EAVE *advances.* MRS. MARSH *and* ANNIS, *who have moved away from the* PRINCESS *and* EAVE, *now rejoin the* PRINCESS.

EAVE.

[*Shaking hands with* FAY.] I trust I didn't weary you at the dinner-table with my stories of Abyssinia.

FAY.

[*Sweetly.*] Veary! I could listen to dem for ever!

[EAVE *goes off with* SIR GEORGE.

PRINCESS.

[*To* ANNIS *and* FAY.] Good-night, children. [*Kissing* ANNIS *affectionately.*] Good-night, Annis.

ANNIS.

Thank you for allowing me to come down to-night, Princess.

PRINCESS.

[*Stroking* ANNIS'S *brow.*] Ah——! [*She kisses* FAY *less demonstratively.* FAY *accepts the kiss without much response.*] You have tired eyes. You read in your room till early hours, they tell me. You'll regret it when you are my age.

FAY.

I will not read to-night.

PRINCESS.

That's sensible. Good-night. [FAY, *with a stiff body, and with fingers again outstretched, goes off with* ANNIS. *To* MRS. MARSH, *who comes to the* PRINCESS.] Evelyn, I want to be left to myself for a little while. Tell the servants they are not to come in here till I am out of the room.

MRS. MARSH.

[*Hesitatingly.*] Why—why are you not going out?

PRINCESS.

[*Moving away, opening and shutting her fan.*] I am disinclined for a crowd, for wearing a fixed smile for an hour or two. Don't go to bed. I shall be glad of your company when I come upstairs. [MRS. MARSH *moves to the door, and stands there looking at the* PRINCESS *wistfully.*] That is all, Evelyn.

[MRS. MARSH *withdraws. After a short pause, the* PRINCESS *securely closes the lower doors, and the upper doors on the left, and, having lowered the blinds as she passes the windows, goes to the upper doors on the right and draws them together without quite closing them. Then she sits, staring before her. Suddenly, turning her head, she listens intently. She composes herself as* EDWARD ORIEL *enters, carrying his hat and overcoat. He closes the door carefully, deposits his hat and coat*

upon the settee, and comes to her. She rises, dignified, calm. He takes her hand, bends over it, and kisses it.

PRINCESS.

[*Withdrawing her hand.*] Thank you for granting my request, Mr. Oriel.

EDWARD.

Thank me——!

PRINCESS.

Perhaps it is inconsiderate of me to have asked you to spare me a few minutes to-night. You must not be late at the Élysée——

EDWARD.

I have some hope of your allowing me to be your escort.

PRINCESS.

I should have been happy—but there is no Élysée for me to-night.

EDWARD.

Princess——!

PRINCESS.

Mr. Oriel—[*a slight pause, during which she palpably nerves herself*] it has already been an effort to me to get through so much of this evening. I—I am uneasy, even unhappy——

EDWARD.

Unhappy——!

PRINCESS.

Frankly, I cannot rest, sleep, face people with composure, until I have talked to you, reasoned with you, on the subject of this—this—madness.

EDWARD.

[*After a short silence.*] Madness? [*She sits, without speaking.*] Madness!

PRINCESS.

It is five days since you—since you—spoke to me, is it not?

EDWARD.

Yes.

PRINCESS.

[*Passing her hand over her brow.*] I asked you, I think, to keep silent for a week, to allow no one to suspect your feelings towards me, to—to——

EDWARD.

To come to you at the expiration of a week, for your answer.

PRINCESS.

[*Somewhat faintly.*] For my answer? Surely that was not my expression?

EDWARD.

Your answer. That was the word—your answer, Princess.

PRINCESS.

I wished to give you time to reflect. My surprise must have betrayed me into employing so misleading a word.

EDWARD.

And your desire that I should have time for reflection now impels you to dismiss me at the end of five days?

PRINCESS.

It has struck me that, after all, I may only be subjecting you to unnecessary suspense. [*Suffering.*] I—I cannot wait till the week expires.

EDWARD.

Something has changed you, Princess.

PRINCESS.

Why do you say that? What do you charge me with?

EDWARD.

With having been another woman, five days ago.

PRINCESS.

I repeat, you must have—misunderstood——

EDWARD.

Misunderstood—— !

PRINCESS.

Oh, it was impossible, from the beginning.

[*He walks away, and takes up his hat and coat. She rises. He turns to her and bows. She holds out her hand.*] Not like that, Mr. Oriel.

[*He comes to her, takes her hand in his for a moment, and turns away, his head bowed. She says, very gently.*] Poor boy !

EDWARD.

[*In a broken voice.*] Boy—— !

PRINCESS.

Oh, I know. I speak comparatively. Pay your court to a girl of eighteen, Mr. Oriel, and you are man enough. But—to a woman of my age—— [*He turns to her.*] Yes, yes, yes, Aunt Mary was right. Humour, that "saving grace of life," is indeed denied to you ! A young man of six—or seven, is it !—seven and twenty, and a woman of nearly forty ! forty ! oh, Mr. Oriel !

EDWARD.

Princess, you need not let my youth scare you. Those belonging to me will tell you—I have never been young.

PRINCESS.

I have been young, and I cannot forget it.

EDWARD.

You do yourself injustice. You take no account of your great gifts, of the graciousness of your disposition, the generosity of your heart, the alertness of your mind——

PRINCESS.

Hush! your blind admiration invests me with all these fictitious qualities. I am vain—nothing more.

EDWARD.

I will not believe that. But if it were true, you would have but to look into your mirror, to be satisfied.

PRINCESS.

What should I see there? Ah, you cannot put it into words—I can. I should see "a well-preserved woman." Do you know what a well-preserved woman resembles? A harp-string strung to its uttermost tension! The string may be in tune, capable of producing most captivating sounds. But the next thing that happens to it is—it breaks.

[*She walks away and sits with her face averted from him.*

EDWARD.

I take you at your word, Princess. But let us vary your metaphor. Let us agree that the shadow upon your dial faintly touches the meridian. [*She utters a little sound, half-laugh, half-sigh, in assent.*] Come then! Is this the lesson your experience has taught you—that in contemplating the most critical step in life, an earnest, reflective man is mainly attracted by the lighter endowments of womankind? Ah, no!

PRINCESS.

You mean, you are not so attracted?

EDWARD.

I do.

PRINCESS.

[*Turning to him—indicating the chair facing her.*] Sit down for a moment. [*He sits, somewhat stiffly, placing his hat and coat upon the chair between them.*] Hearken to the truth. Mr. Oriel, you wish to marry me. You are not in the least under the spell of any outward grace still remaining to me. No, you have no thought but for my amiability of temper, my sound qualities of character. Briefly, you desire to be less a lover than a devoted friend, a companion, under the name of husband. Is not that so?

EDWARD.

You remember my words.

PRINCESS.

Now for the truth. When—to use your own expression—I dismiss you, I hold out my hand to you in friendship—[*smilingly*]—the hand you have, two minutes previously, slightly scorched with your salute. You come to me; you take my hand; I feel yours tremble. I look up at you—what a woful face! Your lip quivers; you, the earnest, reflective, old-young man, the cunning analyst of woman's character—you are at the point of breaking-down like a schoolboy. [*He makes a movement. She lays her closed fan upon his arm.*] I am not mocking you; only opening your eyes. I have nearly finished. What reason did you, in a fit of absent-mindedness, give Aunt Mary for your not wishing to quit this city? Because Paris is satisfying. Really? Tell me now, honestly—if I struck my tents to-morrow, would Paris continue to be satisfying, or would you then prefer to follow my caravan? Honestly? [*His eyes meet hers for a moment, then he stares at the ground.*] Finally. You know you are attempting to lower yourself to the level of some of the dandies who flit about me here? How comes it you are found haunting the shops of the coiffeur and the parfumeur? Why is your coat suddenly of the most modern mode? And why are you, as long as daylight countenances it, decorated with an orchid that must fill our poor butterfly, Sir George Lamorant, with envy? Why is all this?

EDWARD.

[*Blankly.*] Princess——!

PRINCESS.

I will tell you. Because you are deceiving yourself. Because you are not the wise, sober person you pretend to be. Because you have, in the old, simple fashion, lost your foolish heart. Because you are young, young, young——!

EDWARD.

And because you are beautiful!

PRINCESS.

[*With a graceful shrug of the shoulders, turning from him.*] Well! you see——!

EDWARD.

Yes—you are right. I—I have been deceiving myself, and you.

PRINCESS.

No, not me.

EDWARD.

[*Leaning his head upon his hands.*] Ah, Princess! why, when I would appear to you older than my years, do you make a child of me? [*Suddenly throwing himself upon his knees before her, clasping her hand and waist.*] I love you! I love you! I love you!

PRINCESS.

[*With her hand to her bosom—faintly.*] For mercy's sake, don't tell me like that!

EDWARD.

Forgive me! forgive me!

PRINCESS.

Forgive you—! [*Yieldingly—her head drooping over his.*] Oh, heaven, I would not have it otherwise!

[*There is a moment's silence; then they raise their heads and look at each other.*

EDWARD.

[*In wonderment.*] Princess——!

[*They rise, she guiltily. She leaves him; he follows her.*

PRINCESS.

Good-night, Mr. Oriel.

EDWARD.

You would not have it otherwise!

PRINCESS.

Good-night.

EDWARD.

Tell me—!

PRINCESS.

[*Passionately.*] I have told you I am vain. You know how my life has been spent, these twenty years past. My maturity is not the placid, dignified

maturity it should be. There clings to me the aroma of stale girlhood. I admit that I have been fluttered, confused by your profession of love—— [*He seizes her hand, she releases herself.*] But for your own future's sake, if not for the sake of the remnant of self-respect I have left me, oh, please desist!

EDWARD.

You will see me to-morrow? [*She wrings her hands. He takes up his hat and coat.*] To-morrow?

PRINCESS.

As——?

EDWARD.

Your lover. Your lover!

PRINCESS.

No! I cannot, will not allow you to speak to me of love again. Let us forget—forget entirely——

EDWARD.

Forget!

PRINCESS.

[*Standing before him, with drooping head.*] It would appear strange to our friends, perhaps, were we to avoid each other suddenly. But you must never remind me, by word or look, of this—to me—humiliating interview——

SIR GEORGE LAMORANT *enters, carrying his hat and overcoat.*

PRINCESS.

[*Turning to* SIR GEORGE, *quickly.*] Ah! you will both be late at the Élysée, surely? Why don't you go together?

SIR GEORGE.

I want to speak to you for a moment, if I may.

EDWARD.

[*To* SIR GEORGE, *stiffly.*] We may meet in the crowd. Good-night, Princess.

PRINCESS.

[*Formally.*] Good-night, Mr. Oriel.

[EDWARD *goes out.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking after him.*] A reserved, cold-blooded boy, that.

PRINCESS.

Very.

SIR GEORGE.

Pardon me. You look a little——

PRINCESS.

[*In a faint voice.*] My head. It doesn't matter. [*Sitting.*] I am not going out.

SIR GEORGE.

So Mrs. Marsh tells me. [*Sympathetically.*] Poor lady! I am afraid the Zuliani has been troubling you again.

PRINCESS.

She's a stony-hearted little plague. A sad disappointment.

SIR GEORGE.

It is about her I wished to speak to you. But some other time——

PRINCESS.

No, no——

SIR GEORGE.

[*Producing a letter.*] I have received another letter to-day from New York—[*handing her the letter*] from the woman who was with the wretched Flavio Zuliani when he died.

PRINCESS.

[*Reading the letter in an absent way.*] Oh——?

SIR GEORGE.

We are arriving at the details by degrees. What do you say now?

PRINCESS.

Of course, that the girl is no more your poor brother's child than I am.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Nodding assent.*] No motive is ascribed there, but——

PRINCESS.

It is sufficiently plain, I think. On the death of your brother's little daughter another child was found to fill her place, to preserve the claim to the allowance.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Assenting again.*] What damned villains there are in the——! I beg your pardon.

PRINCESS.

No, no, I agree with you.

SIR GEORGE.

However, there's one less, since Signor Zuliani has joined the Infernal orchestra. Thank God, in any event there is no ground for suspecting poor Fay to be a party to the fraud.

PRINCESS.

Oh, no, George. According to this, Fay herself was only an infant at the time. Part maid, part monkey, she is honourable enough. [*Returning the letter.*] What are you going to do—let her know?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Mournfully.*] I am merely waiting for a communication from Milan, from the priest to whom Zuliani appears to have sent evidence of his rascality. I may find it at the club to-night, and then——

PRINCESS.

[*Rising.*] She doesn't care for me, but—tell her I remain her friend.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Bowing to her gratefully.*] Ah——!

PRINCESS.

Ha, ha! and I saw Rupert's eyes looking at me from under her lashes!

SIR GEORGE.

Yes, and this is the girl who was to fill the void in your life.

PRINCESS.

Oh! oh! I am unhappy, George— desperately unhappy!

[*She moves away and sits with her back turned to him, wiping her eyes. He throws his hat and coat upon a settee and sits.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Not looking at her.*] Dear Laura, I am profoundly sorry.

PRINCESS.

[*Gazing at the door at which* EDWARD *has gone out.*] My good friend, the weak, irresolute, doting age of men and women is not youth, nor old age. It is—our time of life.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Soothingly.*] Come, come, come! you have been firmly affectionate, not weak and doting, in your relations with Fay.

PRINCESS.

[*Her eyes upon the door.*] Fay—yes. But if I was ever tempted to be weak—with some other person?

SIR GEORGE.

With whom?

PRINCESS.

[*Fretfully.*] How can I tell? anybody—anybody. [*Rising, as she speaks, and taking a few steps towards the door.*] I have an odd fear that I am one of those silly women whose destiny it is to struggle and fight to keep their dignity and who, in the end, yield and do something the world calls ridiculous.

SIR GEORGE.

[*After a pause.*] Laura.

PRINCESS.

Yes?

SIR GEORGE.

Forgive my impertinence. But of course I know how a woman situated as you are is beset on all sides. You give me the idea that you are frightened of being

induced some day to—to forego your liberty—marry —again.

[*She gives him a quick, suspicious look, then comes to him. He rises.*

PRINCESS.

[*Laughing artificially.*] Ha, ha, ha! Well, many a lonely, dissatisfied woman has made a laughing-stock of herself in that way.

SIR GEORGE.

Not necessarily a laughing-stock.

PRINCESS.

But very often. And lonely man also. Do you never shiver at the thought that, despite your hypochondria, perhaps because of it, you may yet—yet——?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Laughing.*] Fall in love?

PRINCESS.

Ha, ha! yes.

SIR GEORGE.

No, no!

PRINCESS.

Injudiciously, I mean—injudiciously.

SIR GEORGE.

Injudiciously. On my travels, with the daughter of an Australian, or a South African, farmer? A pretty young face under the brim of a tennis-hat——?

PRINCESS.

Well——

SIR GEORGE.

[*With mock earnestness.*] Heaven spare one from anything of that sort?

PRINCESS.

[*Moving away, staring at the ground.*] Yes, heaven spare one from anything of that sort!

[*Laughingly, he takes up his hat and coat, and then turns to her. She is standing, self-absorbed. He contemplates her silently for a moment; gradually his expression and bearing undergo a change.*

SIR GEORGE.

Princess——

PRINCESS.

[*Rousing herself.*] Forgive me.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Inviting her to sit.*] If I am not tiring you unmercifully—— [*She sits, a little surprised. He deliberately fetches another chair and sits near her. She watches him inquiringly.*] You have set me thinking. [*Smilingly.*]

I am forbidden the process—thought is the door-keeper to dyspepsia—so I discharge my load promptly. Laura, I wonder whether or not it would be well for you and me—to marry.

PRINCESS.

Marry? whom?

SIR GEORGE.

Each other.

PRINCESS.

Each other!

SIR GEORGE.

Pardon my egotism. I have already caught myself reviewing my plans rather frequently of late—the effect of your charming hospitality. What, I have asked myself, stripped of poetic accessories, is the prospect ahead of me? Travel—banishment—unrest—continual discontent; ultimately, confirmed misanthropy. I have conjured up, too, the dreadful possibility of my returning, in a poor, cowardly way, after many years of wandering; of my dragging myself homeward; reappearing in Bond Street, a decrepit, painfully well-groomed, shrivelled, ghastly, starched Rip Van Winkle. [*Shuddering.*] Oh, Laura! as the Zuliani would say—my Lord!

[*She laughs again, weakly, hiding her eyes with her hand.*

Now for yourself. *Place aux dames*—yes, for are not the choice fruits of the earth always served last? What is your case? I'll not re-state it, except to

remark that life appears to have evolved suddenly a new terror for you—the fear that, should you ever re-marry, your marriage might be an ill-judged one.

PRINCESS.

I have—these—queer fancies—at times——

SIR GEORGE.

Well, suppose you and I became—husband and wife? I am sufficiently your senior. You are rich; I am far from the state of a beggar. The world could not throw up its hands in surprise. Would it not be, in all ways, a suitable match? We both suffer—morbidly, fantastically, it may be, but we suffer. Should we not find, in each other, a cure? You dread being tempted to marry unwisely. No such temptation, I believe, is likely to befall me. But, at any rate, your honouring me as I propose would make both—safe.

PRINCESS.

Safe——

SIR GEORGE.

What do you say?

PRINCESS.

[*Her eyes closed.*] We should not—naturally—love each other.

SIR GEORGE.

At our age, I suppose, there is no love but in folly—— [*She makes a movement.*] Forgive me. The expression, "our time of life," was your own. [*She*

assents by a nod.] I speak, of course, of passionate love. Otherwise—[*rising*] am I quite outside the reach of your tender regard? As for passion, let us make ourselves believe that we would not be five-and-twenty if we could! Passion! My dear Laura, has it ever happened to you to stroll through a garden on the morning following a great letting-off of fireworks? Oh, the hollow, blackened shells! the spent cartridges trodden into the turf! We should at least be spared the contemplation of *that*. But you and I are already fast-linked by many associations; and sympathy is affection. Certainly, in that spirit, *I* love *you*, most sincerely.

PRINCESS.

[*In a strange voice.*] Say three times you love me.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Puzzled.*] Three times——?

PRINCESS.

"I love you"—thrice.

SIR GEORGE.

[*As if repeating a lesson.*] I love you. I love you. I love you. [*She throws her head back and breaks into a peal of hysterical laughter.*] I distress you.

PRINCESS.

Yes——

SIR GEORGE.

Perhaps you will let me refer to the subject again [*taking up his coat*] in a few days—next week——

[*She rises and goes to him, laying a hand upon his arm.*

PRINCESS.

[*Faintly.*] You are right. It would make us both—safe. I want to feel myself—in harbour.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Taking both her hands in his.*] Ah——!

PRINCESS.

[*Drawing back, frightened.*] Oh, but you mustn't hurry me. I—I must have time—to consider——

SIR GEORGE.

Everything shall be as you wish.

PRINCESS.

Time to decide——

SIR GEORGE.

Why not? How long—a month?

PRINCESS.

[*Nodding.*] A month.

SIR GEORGE.

Then, a month from to-day—thirty days?——

PRINCESS.

Thirty-one days——

SIR GEORGE.

[*With a bow.*] You will come to me, and either lay your hand in mine or shake your head at me severely. In the meanwhile, we will let the whole matter be our secret?

PRINCESS.

Yes, yes, our secret. [*Drawing back.*] Because I may say No to you, remember.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Taking up his hat.*] Well, I may at least flatter myself that I am bound to you for a month.

PRINCESS.

[*Relenting.*] And beyond that, *really*. Only I want to familiarize myself with the idea—— [*There is a gentle knock at the door.*] Qui est là?

[MRS. MARSH'S *voice is heard.*

MRS. MARSH.

Are you alone, Princess?

PRINCESS.

One moment. [*To* SIR GEORGE, *in a low voice, giving him her hand.*] Good-night.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Retaining her hand.*] How extraordinary! You and I——

PRINCESS.

Perhaps!

SIR GEORGE.

Certainly, perhaps.

PRINCESS.

I seem to trifle with you. But it will be—in all probability—as you desire.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking at her affectionately, but with a smile playing about the corners of his mouth.*] Thanks, Laura. Good-night.

PRINCESS.

[*Shrinking, almost imperceptibly, under the steadiness of his gaze.*] Thanks, George. Good-night. [*He goes out. After a short pause, during which she remains motionless.*] Come in! [MRS. MARSH *enters, and stands looking at the* PRINCESS *hesitatingly.*] Well, Evelyn?

MRS. MARSH.

I am wrong, to hang about you so. But, I—I can't help feeling concerned——

PRINCESS.

Concerned——?

MRS. MARSH.

[*Approaching.*] I have watched you during the past week——

PRINCESS.

Really!

MRS. MARSH.

I mean I have noticed you are not yourself. Something is worrying you to death.

PRINCESS.

[*Leaning heavily upon* MRS. MARSH'S *arm.*] Oh——

MRS. MARSH.

What is it?

PRINCESS.

[*Her head drooping upon* MRS. MARSH'S *shoulder.*] Am I cross with you—a vixen?

MRS. MARSH.

Never.

PRINCESS.

[*Whimpering.*] I am. Oh! some day I'll confide in you. Oh!

MRS. MARSH.

Why do you remain down here? Come upstairs, to your piano.

PRINCESS.

[*Pacing the room.*] No.

MRS. MARSH.

[*Going to her, putting an arm round her.*] It soothes you. We will play to each other. You shall sing to me. [*Leading her towards the door.*] I'll not leave you till you are quite tired.

PRINCESS.

Tell the servants this room is now vacant. [MRS. MARSH *goes to the bell-rope, and rings.*] Evelyn.

MRS. MARSH

Yes?

PRINCESS.

[*Staring before her.*] Thirty-one days hence. What date does that bring one to, next month?

[*A Servant enters.*

SERVANT.

Pardon, madame la Princesse. C'est Monsieur Oriel qui revient demander à madame la Princesse de bien vouloir lui accorder encore une entrevue de quelques instants.

PRINCESS.

Mr. Oriel—! [*To the Servant.*] Mais oui, Victor, puisque Monsieur Oriel le demande. [*The Servant*

withdraws.] Why should Mr. Oriel come back? Nothing has happened, I hope.

The Servant re-enters, with EDWARD. EDWARD *stands, looking at the* PRINCESS.

PRINCESS.

[*To the Servant.*] Victor!

SERVANT.

Madame——?

PRINCESS.

Vous pouvez revenir dans cinq minutes.

SERVANT.

Bien, madame la Princesse.

[*The Servant retires.* EDWARD *comes forward.*

PRINCESS.

[*To* MRS. MARSH.] Open the piano in my room. Get me out a volume of Berlioz.

[MRS. MARSH *goes out. After listening for the closing of the door, the* PRINCESS *sits, looking at* EDWARD *with cold dignity.*

EDWARD.

[*Brokenly.*] You will find this almost inexcusable, I fear. But I . . . I have been watching the lights here . . . I thought you would perhaps permit me to say Farewell to you.

PRINCESS.

Farewell—— ?

EDWARD.

I cannot see you, meet you, and obey the conditions you impose upon me. I shall beg my Chief to let me return to London to-morrow, and then—I hardly know. But I must go.

PRINCESS.

You are the best judge of your own strength.

EDWARD.

I have no strength, in this.

PRINCESS.

Your chances in life will in no way suffer, I hope.

EDWARD.

Thank you.

PRINCESS.

What a pity ! what a pity !

EDWARD.

And so, Princess, I wish you simply, gratefully, devotedly, Farewell!

[*After a short silence, she rises.*

PRINCESS.

You are young, and—by-and-by—. But I would not have you dismiss me from your memory altogether. Farewell.

[*Standing away from him, with her hands behind her back and with closed eyes, she inclines her face towards him. He puts his lips to her brow. They remain quite still for a moment, then she sinks into the chair which is behind her.*

EDWARD.

[*Bending over her.*] You are faint.

PRINCESS.

[*Helplessly.*] The room is hot. I—I'll join Evelyn.

[*He hesitates, puts his hat aside, and, going to the window, draws up the blind and opens the window. Then he returns to her. She rises unsteadily, holding on to his arm, and walks a step or two towards the window, for the air. The piano is heard, the sound coming from above and entering at the open window.*

PRINCESS.

[*In a murmur.*] That is Evelyn.

EDWARD.

Shall I send for her?

PRINCESS.

[*Looking at him, dully.*] Eh?

EDWARD.

Shall I send for Mrs. Marsh?

[*She makes no answer, but continues to look at him. Suddenly her eyes dilate.*

PRINCESS.

Edward——!

EDWARD.

Princess?

PRINCESS.

Do not go away—for a month.

EDWARD.

What—what do you mean?

PRINCESS.

Continue to be—a friend to me—for a month.

EDWARD.

It is impossible! Near you, or away from you, I must always be your lover——

PRINCESS.

Yes—— !

EDWARD.

Never again can I be simple friend.

PRINCESS.

Then—if it be so—would you rather go now, and love me from afar, or stay—and love me near—for a month ?

EDWARD.

[*Dazed.*] I don't understand——

PRINCESS.

[*Wildly.*] Playing at happiness, and youth, for a month !

EDWARD.

I'll stay !

PRINCESS.

A month ! I swear it shall be no longer ! not a day longer !

EDWARD.

As you will !

PRINCESS.

Can we begin too soon ? You have never seen my nest. It is still early. Will you come upstairs and hear some music ?

EDWARD.

[*Taking up his hat.*] Yes.

PRINCESS.

Evelyn and I will entertain you with Berlioz and Saint Saëns. Will you breakfast here to-morrow? There will be people, but you and I can watch each other, over the flowers——

[*They go off together. After a short pause, two Servants enter, and proceed methodically to close the jalousies at each window, securing them from the inside. They then shut the windows, bolting them carefully, glance round the room and withdraw. When the last window is closed, the sound of the piano ceases. Directly the Servants have retired, the lights go out suddenly and the room is plunged into almost utter darkness. After a moment or two,* ANNIS *softly opens the lower doors on the left, enters, closes the doors, and creeps in on tiptoe, and stands waiting. There is another brief pause, and then* FAY, *dressed in a domino which completely conceals her figure, steals in at the opposite doors.*

FAY.

[*In a whisper.*] Annis!

ANNIS.

[*In a whisper.*] Fay!

FAY.

[*Approaching* ANNIS, *breathlessly.*] At last!

ANNIS.

[*Trembling.*] Yes. What—what——?

FAY.

Attend. [*Pointing to the window.*] Ven I go out dere, you must bolt de jalousie after me and shut de vindow fast. Den—are you very sleepy, dear?

ANNIS.

Yes—no—I don't know.

FAY.

Because, venever you are q'vite sure all de people are back and de 'ouse is really settled, you must creep down again, unlock dose doors, if dey should be locked, open de vindow, and unbolt de jalousie. So dat I may 'ave no difficulty in getting in, you understand. [*Going.*] Good-night.

ANNIS.

[*Following her, clutching her arm.*] Fay, Fay, where are you going? You shall tell me, or I won't——!

FAY.

Hush! [*Drawing her hood over her head.*] I am going to de Bal Masqué at de Opera 'Ouse

ANNIS.

Oh! oh——!

FAY.

Sssh! sssh!

ANNIS.

Whom with?

FAY.

Vit Blanche Oriel.

ANNIS.

Miss Oriel!

FAY.

On de quiet, you understand.

ANNIS.

You are sure to be found out. The concierge——

FAY.

[*Opening the window.*] Dat is all right. Monsieur Gontaut is a gr-r-reat friend of mine.

ANNIS.

But—but—who chaperons you?

FAY.

I chaperon Blanche. [*As* FAY *is unbolting the jalousie, the* PRINCESS'S *voice, singing to the accompaniment of the piano, is heard. Drawing back.*] Vat's dat?

ANNIS.

The Princess——

FAY.

[*Unbolting the jalousie.*] She is merry dis ev-e-ning—for 'er. Vell, so shall I be—for me.

ANNIS.

[*Throwing her arms about* FAY.] Don't go, Fay! dear, don't go!

FAY.

My Lord, 'ow you shake! [*Kissing her.*] D'ere! [*Piously.*] Che la Madonna ti assista!

[FAY *passes out.* ANNIS *closes the jalousie.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT.

The Scene represents a smaller room in the house of the PRINCESS PANNONIA *in the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, and shows, from the windows, the same prospect as seen in the previous act. The room is daintily decorated in white, and the furniture is charming and tasteful. On the left are double doors opening on to a passage, while on the right is a single door admitting to a bedroom. At the back are two windows, recessed, over which the curtains are drawn.*

The room is dully lighted. The ashes of a wood fire lie in the fireplace.

SIR GEORGE LAMORANT *is seated at the writing-table writing a letter. He is wearing a frock-coat, and a cravat which covers his shirt-front. His shirt collar and cuffs are the only spots of white in his dress; otherwise he is entirely in black.* FAULDING, SIR GEORGE'S *servant, enters, from the bedroom, a lighted candle in his hand, carrying also a silk hat, an overcoat, and a pair of gloves, which he deposits in various places.* FAULDING *wears a white handkerchief round his neck in place of a shirt-collar, and generally has the air of a man who has interrupted his rest and is going to bed again.*

SIR GEORGE.

Faulding.

FAULDING.

Yes, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

Attend to me very carefully.

FAULDING

Yes, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

This letter I am writing is to the Princess Pannonia.

FAULDING.

Yes, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

I shall leave it, addressed and sealed, [*pulling out and closing a drawer which is in the table*] in this drawer.

FAULDING.

[*Arranging the overcoat over the upper end of the settee.*] In that drawer, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

I don't anticipate that I shall be detained by the friend I am going to see, but should I not have returned by mid-day I wish you to take this letter out of the drawer and deliver it, yourself, to the Princess Pannonia. Mid-day.

FAULDING.

Twelve o'clock, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Resuming writing.*] However, I fully expect to be back again by ten, eleven at latest. I am sorry to have had you out of bed at this hour, Faulding. Thank you.

FAULDING.

[*Taking his candlestick from the mantel-piece.*] I beg pardon, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

Eh?

FAULDING.

I grieve to see, Sir George, that you're in mourning. We haven't got very much deep mourning clothes here, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

It doesn't matter. [*Brushing a speck of dust from his sleeve.*] A mere mark of respect to the friend I am going to visit. Good night—good morning.

FAULDING.

Good morning, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

Oh, Faulding, what did I do with the letter I brought home from the club last night?

FAULDING.

[*At the door.*] Letter, Sir George?

SIR GEORGE.

I want to enclose it in this.

FAULDING.

I haven't yet emptied the pockets of your dress coat, Sir George——

SIR GEORGE.

Of course, it is in the breast-pocket—— [*Rising, stopping* FAULDING *who is about to re-cross the room, and taking up the lamp.*] Don't trouble. Get back to bed.

FAULDING

Thank you, Sir George.

FAULDING *goes out.* SIR GEORGE, *carrying the lamp, disappears into the bedroom. The room is now in complete darkness. After some moments,* FAY *enters hurriedly, closes the door and stands listening breathlessly. She is still in her domino. Suddenly, alarmed by a sound in the passage, she utters a half-stifled cry of fright, and crouches down in front of the settee. After remaining in this position for a little while, she turns her head sharply towards the bedroom door, as if startled by a sound coming from that direction. She rises, hesitates for a moment, then conceals herself behind the curtains at the window.* SIR GEORGE *re-enters, the lamp in one hand, a letter in the other. He replaces the lamp, and lays the letter upon the table. There is a knock at the door.*

SIR GEORGE.

Who is that? [FAULDING *re-enters, candlestick in hand, looking a little scared.*] Hullo?

FAULDING.

[*Glancing round the room.*] I really beg pardon, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

What——?

FAULDING.

A most extree-ordinary thing, Sir George. On leavin' you I went along the corridor to the main staircase, not wishing my boots to be heard on the servants' stairs, there being no carpet. I had barely ascended two or three steps towards my floor, Sir George, when I detected a rustle. Shading my candle with my hand, I looked over and saw a black figure—a figure in black, Sir George—creeping up from below. Suddenly the figure catches sight of me and scurries away along the corridor. If it 's all right, Sir George, of course I—I really beg pardon again——

SIR GEORGE.

If what is all right?

FAULDING.

The figure, Sir George. It's in here.

SIR GEORGE.

Here?

FAULDING.

I see it disappear through these doors, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking round the room.*] You must have been mistaken.

[FAULDING *glances at the window-curtains.* SIR GEORGE *goes promptly to the curtains behind which* FAY *is concealed,* FAULDING, *with less decision, to the curtains at the other window. A hand grasps* SIR GEORGE'S *arm appealingly; he closes the curtains sharply.*

FAULDING.

[*Turning away from the window.*] Nothing, Sir George.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Coming to him.*] Nothing.

FAULDING.

[*Drawing his hand across his brow.*] I—I am extremely sorry—I—I'm sure——

SIR GEORGE.

You see, you have been mistaken. Go back to bed at once. Don't disturb me again on any account.

[FAULDING *withdraws dejectedly.* SIR GEORGE *stands at the open door for a moment or two, watching the man's retreat; then he closes the door carefully.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Quietly.*] Fay. [*There is no response.*] You are at your tricks again, I suspect. Can't you show yourself?

FAY.

[*Emerging, but remaining at the curtains shamefacedly.*] Oh, yes.

SIR GEORGE.

What is it you are wearing—a domino?

FAY.

Yes.

SIR GEORGE.

Why?

FAY.

I am jus' seeing 'ow I look in it.

SIR GEORGE.

At half-past four in the morning?

FAY.

Yes.

SIR GEORGE.

Thank you.

[*He returns to his seat at the table, and resumes writing. Uncomfortably, she comes down to the chair and sits, facing the empty fireplace.*

FAY.

[*Sullenly.*] I am not a liar. I 'ave been to de Bal Masqué at de Opera 'Ouse.

SIR GEORGE.

Good heaven!

FAY.

[*With sudden volubility.*] Oh, yes, good 'eaven, good 'eaven, good 'eaven! 'Eaven is very good, no doubt, but it does not provide me vit sufficient amusement.

SIR GEORGE.

With whom have you been to the ball?

FAY.

I shall not tell. [*He rises and approaches her indignantly. She says quickly.*] Vit Blanche Oriel. [*He pauses.*] I persuaded 'er. You vill not give 'er avay?

SIR GEORGE.

No.

FAY.

Nor me? Nor me—eh?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Sitting upon the settee, leaning his head upon his hands.*] No, Fay. I won't give you away.

FAY.

[*Drawing a deep breath.*] Tank you. [*Twisting her chair round, to face him—with restored confidence and renewed volubility.*] You see, I should 'ave been 'ome hours ago—hours ago, you understand, but, in de first place, our cocher vas dr-r-runk——

SIR GEORGE.

[*Groaning.*] Oh!

FAY.

Be reasonable! You cannot expect a sober cocher at tree in de morning. And, in de second place, Blanche 'ad made a stoopid muddle of 'er arrangement for letting 'erself in.

SIR GEORGE.

Had she indeed! And how did *you* get in, may I ask?

FAY.

De vindow, grand salon.

SIR GEORGE.

The concierge?

FAY.

A very gr-r-reat friend of mine.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Rising and walking about, in a rage.*] Gurrrh!

FAY.

Poor leetle Monsieur Gontaut—you vill not give 'im avay, eh?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Returning to the settee, and sitting again.*] Oh!

FAY.

Ah, it is I who should moan and groan. To meet your fool of a man on de stairs at dis hour, and to be chased like a rabbit! [*Looking round.*] I knew I vas at de door of your petite salon—but vy are you up so soon?

SIR GEORGE.

I? I am going to see a friend in the country, and I—I want to be back early.

FAY.

Dat 's right. My Lord, it is slow ven you are out of de 'ouse! [*Leaning back in her chair and stretching out her feet lazily.*] Ah-h-h! [*After a pause.*] Uncle George, 'ave you a cigarette to spare? [*He has been sitting in an attitude of thought, with his head bowed. He is now staring at her feet.*] Jus' one, eh?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking up at her, steadily.*] Fay, what costume has Miss Oriel worn to-night, at the ball?

FAY.

[*Unsuspectingly.*] Costume—? [*Suddenly withdrawing her feet and laughing roguishly.*] Ah! ha, ha! I know vat you are driving at! Ha, ha, ha! You mean, vat costume 'ave *I* been vearing at de Bal. [*Turning her chair away and huddling herself up in it.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha!

SIR GEORGE.

When you have finished giggling rather insanely——

FAY.

[*Peeping at him over the back of the chair.*] You vill not give me avay?

SIR GEORGE.

I have answered that question already.

[*She slips out of her domino and stands up before him, posing herself with an arm upon the back of the chair and looking down upon him wilfully. She is in the dress of Arlequin. Her mask and hat are suspended from her belt. He stares at her.*

FAY.

[*Demurely.*] You like it?

SIR GEORGE.

[*With set teeth.*] You—you——!

[*He rises, and walks away to the window. There he draws the curtains, opens the window, and looks out. The light is the cold light which precedes dawn.*

FAY.

[*With a shrug of the shoulders.*] Angry?

SIR GEORGE.

Don't ask me.

FAY.

[*After a little pause.*] Oh, I don't care. Everybody is against me—*you* now. [*Cocking her hat upon her head, and adjusting it with the aid of the mirror.*] Non m'importa. Lasciatemi godere la vita! Dis vorld is made to be lived in.

[*Trailing her domino after her, she goes toward the door. He turns sharply and comes down to her, with a look in his eyes that is almost fierce.*]

SIR GEORGE.

[*Laying his hands upon her shoulders.*] You fool! you fool!

FAY.

[*Shrinking from him, crouching over the chair, frightened.*] Ahi——!

SIR GEORGE.

You wilful fool! You are intent upon driving every would be friend away from you—the Princess, the best of friends! What future are you storing up for yourself? The brightest chances are offered to you. All that is asked of you in return is that you should try honestly to subdue the instincts bred by a vaga-

bond life; that you should at least imitate the women you have come to dwell amongst. You are clever, you can parrot and ape well enough when you choose; and you have known what it is to want. [*Gripping her arm and shaking her.*] And yet now, in your time of prosperity and plenty, you must needs be perpetually on the search for opportunities of degrading yourself—degrading yourself——!

FAY.

Lasciatemi andare! lasciatemi—! [*Releasing herself, with a cry of pain.*] Oh—! [*Facing him defiantly.*] No! No, no! I am too old to beat now.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Going back a step or two.*] Beat——!

FAY

Beat. Dis is not de Porta Ticinese at Milan——

SIR GEORGE.

Milan?

FAY.

Vere ve lived. Phew! for a moment you made me tink I vas eight, ten, twelve again. Ugh! your eyes looked like Flavio Zuliani's, ven he stood over me vid a steeck in 'is 'and. You men are all alike. Bon soir.

[*She gathers up her domino and turns boldly, to the door. He bars her way, standing before the door.*

SIR GEORGE.

Wait a minute—— !

FAY.

No. [*Haughtily.*] Let me pass, please. You 'ave no right to be'ave so, though you are my uncle.

SIR GEORGE.

Fay.

FAY.

[*Tapping her foot upon the ground.*] Vell ?

SIR GEORGE.

You are mistaken. We are not related, you and I. You are not my niece. You are not my brother's child.

FAY.

[*Staring at him.*] Vat do you say dat for ?

SIR GEORGE.

It is the truth. Listen. To begin with—Flavio Zuliani is dead.

FAY.

Dead !

SIR GEORGE.

He died, in New York, about five weeks ago.

FAY.

[*In a whisper.*] Dead! Flavio dead! [*Slowly she backs away from him, and sits on the window-stool below the table.*] Poor old Flavio! [*Laying her hands upon her breast, and muttering—almost inaudibly.*] *Ave Maria gratia plena! Sancta Maria Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus nunc et in hora mortis*—[*breaking off, in an awe-struck voice.*] Flavio told me once, 'e didn't vant to die.

SIR GEORGE.

He had a fall, in the streets, and erysipelas supervened. On his death-bed he made a confession to the woman who nursed him. She urged him to send a written statement, with any proofs he could adduce to support it, to his old confessor at the church of St. Eustorgio at Milan——

FAY.

Padre Antonio.

SIR GEORGE.

Entreating Father Antonio to put right, as far as possible, whatever wrong had been done. I have been waiting to receive a communication from Father Antonio before speaking to you. It reached me late last night.

FAY.

Vell? Tell me.

SIR GEORGE.

My brother's daughter died, a baby, three years old, in Naples. It wasn't convenient to Zuliani just

then, to—to forego the—the—[*turning away*] oh, fill in the blanks, child.

FAY.

De allowance—— !

SIR GEORGE.

[*Going back to the window, and looking out.*] Yes, Fay.

FAY.

Fay ! Fay ! But I am not Fay. Who am I ?

SIR GEORGE.

Your mother was a niece of Zuliani's.

FAY.

Is dere anybody alive belonging to me ?

SIR GEORGE.

No.

FAY.

[*Glancing at him, then staring into space again.*] And you—you—— ? I am not'ing to you now, den.

SIR GEORGE.

We are friends—friends. Of course you will continue to be "Fay," and you must never cease to regard me as your friend. [*Taking up the letter he has brought from the bedroom.*] Father Antonio's letter gives us your real name. [*He stands at the table, looking*

through the letter. She puts her hand to her brow confusedly; in doing so she touches her hat. She takes off her hat, looks at it blankly, and lets it fall to the ground.] Lucia Bresca. [*Looking down upon her.*] Lucia—it would be impossible. The name her English mother gave my brother's little child seems to have been invented for you—Fay.

[*She raises her eyes to his, and drops them quickly. She is still holding her domino; she now resumes it, drawing it round her uneasily.*

FAY.

Vell, I 'ave 'ad a very good time since I left Flavio, tanks to you. [*Drawing a deep breath.*] Everyting comes to an end, soon or late, doesn't it?

SIR GEORGE.

To an end! Why, what difference need this—this discovery make to you?

FAY.

[*Coldly.*] Eh?

SIR GEORGE.

Except in regard to your relationship to myself, all may be as before. As for your future—when I first projected going abroad I provided for that. And while I live——

FAY.

Oh, no, tånk you.

SIR GEORGE.

What do you mean?

FAY.

I am Lucia Bresca now—not'ing vatever to you. [*With an exclamation of impatience, he turns away, and paces to and fro.*] I mean it, I assure you. I can alvays earn my living at de piano; at de school you sent me to dey told me dat.

SIR GEORGE.

Piano! tsch!

FAY.

[*Leaning upon the mantel-piece with a little sigh.*] I am sorry I vas so troublesome at school. Does de Princess know?

SIR GEORGE.

Yes; but she, like myself, has been waiting for Father Antonio's letter. She also remains your true friend. And, oh, my dear girl, why risk losing the Princess's good-will by such outrageous pranks as this? It was the thought of your egregious folly that made me rather brutal to you a minute or two ago. Play the piano—earn sixpence an hour at it!—but don't trifle with such a heaven-sent gift as the Princess Pannonia's friendship. I gripped your arm very tightly, I am afraid.

FAY.

A leetle.

SIR GEORGE.

I am like all even-tempered—devils. We break out but once in ten years, and then——! You see, I have really been angry with you ever since we came to

Paris; you have been conducting yourself so exceptionally badly; my rage has been pent up, until at last—[*Gently.*] But I hurt you. I have no excuse. I apologize, my dear.

FAY.

[*Shrinkingly.*] To me! oh, no!

SIR GEORGE.

Forget it. [*Giving her the letter he still holds.*] You had better look through this letter at once; I am sending it to the Princess. [*She takes the letter and begins reading it.*] I have some other letters, in the next room—from the woman who was with Zuliani when he died. I'll give them to you; you can examine them at any time.

[*Carrying the lighted candle, he goes into the bedroom. She is intent upon the letter he has handed to her. To decipher it more easily, she moves to the front of the table and holds it under the light of the lamp. When she has finished reading, she sits, in* SIR GEORGE'S *writing-chair, her elbow upon the table, her head resting upon her right hand, thinking. Her left hand, in which is Father Antonio's letter, hangs by her side. Gradually her eyes travel to the letter which* SIR GEORGE *has been writing to the* PRINCESS. *She is staring at it, as if fascinated, when* SIR GEORGE *returns carrying a little packet of papers.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Blowing out the candle and replacing it on the mantelpiece.*] Here they are. [*Turning to her—realizing what has happened.*] Fay——!

FAY.

[*Rising, her hand to her brow.*] Oh——!

SIR GEORGE

[*Going to her side—pointing to his letter to the* PRINCESS.] You have been reading that letter—my letter to the Princess Pannonia.

FAY.

I saw some vords. I couldn't 'elp it.

SIR GEORGE.

It is my fault. I ought not to have allowed it to lie here open.

FAY.

Vat are you going to do? Oh, vat are you going to do?

SIR GEORGE.

Take part in a most ridiculous ceremony—that is all.

FAY.

But—a duel!

SIR GEORGE.

A pretty duel!

FAY.

Vit Mr. Demailly—!

SIR GEORGE.

My dear girl, I shall be back again before you are out of your first sleep.

FAY.

[*Gripping his arm.*] Sleep! I! go to sleep! oh! suppose—!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Wincing.*] Ah! you are revenging yourself upon my arm—! [*She leaves him, walks away unsteadily and stands clutching the back of the chair.*] Fay, it is not at all likely that necessity will arise for delivering my letter to the Princess. Indeed I am most anxious that she should never know of this foolish excursion of mine to the Bois de Vincennes. You understand? I trust you. You have to keep this matter entirely to yourself.

FAY.

[*Faintly.*] Yes.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Giving her the packet of letters which he has brought from the bedroom.*] Take these, and creep away to your room. The corridors will be full of daylight soon. [*Glancing at the window.*] Here is the dawn.

FAY.

[*Turning her head towards the window, mechanically.*] Dawn——

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking into her face steadily.*] How pale and haggard you are! Some of you women squander your beauty, as some gamblers do their money, for mere excitement. You are rich—but don't play so recklessly, Fay. [*Tenderly.*] You—you—rascal!

[*He gazes at her, lingeringly and silently, for a moment or two longer; then he rouses himself, as if to shake off a spell, and moves away to the table, where he proceeds to enclose and to seal his letter to the* PRINCESS.

FAY.

[*Faintly.*] Ven—ven are you going?

SIR GEORGE.

Directly I have addressed and sealed this letter.

FAY.

My vindow does not look out on to de street. May I vatch you start from 'ere?

SIR GEORGE.

Certainly, if you choose.

FAY.

Vy are you meeting Mr. Demailly?

SIR GEORGE.

The quarrel arose out of his bringing a certain lady to Mr. St. Roche's—a lady I didn't care to have you thrown with

FAY.

To 'ave *me* thrown vit! *me!* Oh, den I am de cause——

SIR GEORGE.

No, no. It was an insult to every other decent woman present, of course.

FAY.

I remember. And I asked 'im to bring dat lady to Mrs. St. Roche's box—? [*Wringing her hands.*] Upon my vord, I thought she vas very nice! oh! oh——!

[*He deposits his letter to the* PRINCESS *in the table-drawer, looks at his watch, hurriedly places it in his pocket, and takes up his overcoat. She lays her hands upon the coat, to assist him.*

SIR GEORGE.

No, no, please don't. [*She sinks on to the settee, burying her face in the cushion, with a moan.*] Fay, Fay! I tell you that this meeting with Mr. Demailly is the merest farce, a stupid display to satisfy a vain young gentleman who has been cut across the shoulders——

FAY.

[*Suddenly, turning to him and clinging to him.*] 'Ark! listen! I owe everyting to you—all de 'appiness I 'ave ever 'ad. You took me from Flavio—a dog's life, a beast's life!—and tried to make de vorld like 'eaven to me. And ven you find out I am not related to you any longer, you do not vant to kick me back into de gutter! You tell me dis meeting vit Demailly is not'ing. Very vell den, I tell you dat if anyting 'appened to you now I should die—you 'ear, die! No, you are not related to me—but verever you are, and verever I am, I shall always be your servant, you understand—your servant, and you are my master. [*Falling upon her knees and crouching at his feet.*] I am grateful! I am grateful—grateful——!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Lifting her from the ground quickly.*] Fay——! [*She sobs, and her head drops upon his breast. There is a pause. Then in a strange voice.*] I am late. I must go. [*She slowly lifts her head. Their eyes meet, and then their lips. He says quietly.*] I will wave my hand to you.

[*He takes up his hat and gloves and, without looking at her again, goes out. She stands at the open window, the light of the dawn upon her face.*

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

THE FIFTH ACT.

The Scene represents a dense, overgrown orchard. The fruit-trees, old and gnarled, grow at irregular intervals from each other. At the back, through the trees, is seen a cottage standing at a considerable distance from the spectator. Nearer to him there is a tree, under the boughs of which a square or oblong table is laid for a meal. The table-cover is of a coarse kind, and the things upon the table are, for the most part, humble in character. Beside the table there are two rush-bottom chairs, and a basket-work chair with arms. Close by is another tree, also the remains of an old stone-and-plaster wall, representing the ruins of another cottage.

The time is morning in early spring. The trees are in blossom, and the scene is full of sunlight.

FAULDING *is arranging the things upon the table. An old man, a peasant, stands by him, giving assistance. An old peasant-woman approaches, carrying some plates and a covered dish. She hands the dish and the plates to* FAULDING, *who sets them out upon the table.* SIR GEORGE LAMORANT *comes along, leaning upon the arm of* MAXIME DEMAILLY. SIR GEORGE *carries his right arm in a sling; his face is pale and his step rather feeble; he has the air of a man recovering from an illness.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*To the old people.*] Bon jour, mes amis.

OLD PEOPLE.

Bon jour, m'sieur.

SIR GEORGE.

[*To* FAULDING.] Mr. Demailly will look after me, Faulding.

[*The old people withdraw.* FAULDING *follows them.* SIR GEORGE *sits, in the chair near the table.* DEMAILLY *attends upon him, helping him to fish, etc.*

SIR GEORGE.

So you must return to London to-night, Maxime?

DEMAILLY.

I am sorry to say, yes. [*Going to the left with the bottle of wine and a serviette in his hand, and looking into the distance.*] But I shall be with you again very soon.

SIR GEORGE.

Good. Are you expecting anybody, at this hour?

DEMAILLY.

[*Disconcerted—returning to the table, wiping the mouth of the bottle vigorously.*] No. Not particularly.

SIR GEORGE.

Barely mid-day. It is somewhat early yet for our friends.

DEMAILLY.

Wine?

SIR GEORGE.

Thanks.

DEMAILLY.

[*Pouring out wine.*] One thing I am thankful for—to see you so well before I leave.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Eating.*] It would be extremely ungrateful of me, were I *not* well.

DEMAILLY.

[*Behind* SIR GEORGE, *a hand upon his shoulder.*] Ah, my dear fellow, let me tell you, you are very kind, very forgiving.

SIR GEORGE.

Don't be an idiot, Maxime.

DEMAILLY.

[*Walking away.*] Ah——!

SIR GEORGE.

What on earth have I to forgive you for! I have to forgive you for carrying me, after our—after my mishap, to a retreat so beautiful that the mere recollection of a city chills the heart. I have to forgive you for tending me, in my sickness like a brother—like a

sister. I have to forgive you for some days, all too short, of delicious pain——

DEMAILLY.

[*Among the trees.*] Delicious——!

SIR GEORGE.

Delicious. Why, what is it to be hung-over devotedly by half-a-dozen charming women?

DEMAILLY.

[*Kissing his hand to the air.*] Ah! the Princess Pannonia!

SIR GEORGE.

And Lady Ringstead, severe but tender-hearted; Miss Oriel, winsome and merry——

DEMAILLY.

And Miss Zuliani——

SIR GEORGE.

[*In an altered tone.*] And Miss Zuliani. [*Laying down his fork.*] And Miss Zuliani.

DEMAILLY.

Mrs. Marsh——

SIR GEORGE.

Certainly, and good Mrs. Marsh. [*Resuming eating.*] And little Miss Annis.

DEMAILLY.

[*Again looking expectantly into the distance.*] Miss Annis. Yes. [*In a low voice.*] Annis. [*Coming and leaning against the tree under which the table is placed.*] My good friend, I want to—to inform you——

SIR GEORGE.

Of what?

DEMAILLY.

That lady—Mrs. Ware——

SIR GEORGE.

Ah?

DEMAILLY.

It is true. She has gone away, to St. Petersburg, with [*shrugging his shoulders*] a friend of hers.

SIR GEORGE.

I thought you were going to say—of yours.

DEMAILLY.

I wrote to her—[*taking a note from his pocket*] and she replies—[*reading*] "Dearest Max. Why did you not explain to me at first that our marriage in England, or anywhere, without your mother's sanction, would have thrown you upon your own resources? A young man depending upon his own resources can have no existence for me. You have wasted my time. I shall forgive you—when I have forgotten you." What an infatuated fool I have been!

SIR GEORGE.

Yes, Maxime.

DEMAILLY.

And because of this—this lady, you have been made to endure a month of—a month of——

SIR GEORGE.

Dreams

DEMAILLY.

Dreams?

[ANNIS *and* FAY *approach, in out-door apparel.* FAY'S *manner is now changed, she is very gentle and subdued.* SIR GEORGE *rises.*

ANNIS.

[*Shaking hands with* SIR GEORGE.] Good morning. [*Shaking hands with* DEMAILLY.] Good morning. [DEMAILLY *takes off his hat to* FAY, *while* SIR GEORGE *goes to her and shakes hands with her.*] We have come, by train, with Sir Robert and Lady Chichele. They walk so slowly. We gave them the slip—I mean, we walked a little quicker. [*To* SIR GEORGE.] Oh, we are disturbing you at your breakfast.

SIR GEORGE

Not at all.

DEMAILLY.

[*Walking away with* ANNIS.] Let us leave him to finish his breakfast.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Returning to the table, taking up a plate upon which are an orange and a knife.*] Traitor! who is to peel my orange?

DEMAILLY.

[*Laughingly.*] The doctor has not ordered you an orange. [*He and* ANNIS *wander away.*

FAY.

[*Taking the plate from* SIR GEORGE.] Shall I—— ?

[*She sits in a chair, removes her gloves, and peels the orange. He does not resume his seat, but walks about, watching her as he does so, uneasily, wistfully.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*After a pause, abruptly.*] Fay.

FAY.

[*Intent upon the orange.*] Yes?

SIR GEORGE.

Everything comes to an end, sooner or later—as you remarked once, out of the depths of your philosophy. I have given old Robichon and his wife notice that I leave them to-morrow, or the day following.

FAY.

Leave dis cottage! dis orchard!

SIR GEORGE.

I am recovered. Why not?

FAY.

No, vy not? [*Sighing.*] Vell, since you turned de corner of your illness, it 'as been rather nice at Fontenay.

SIR GEORGE.

We have had some pleasant walks here, under these trees.

FAY.

I vas tinking last night—dese trees 'ave blossomed over us.

SIR GEORGE.

So they have; blossomed while you have been leading me under their boughs.

FAY.

I vas tinking, too, nursing vould not be at all a bad profession, if one could alvays nurse at Fontenay.

SIR GEORGE.

And I have thought, more than once, lying-ill would be a charming pastime—if one could always suffer at Fontenay.

[*She rises, and offers him the peeled orange, having transferred it to a clean plate. He advances, takes it from her, and sits.*

FAY.

[*Bending over him, dividing the orange with her fingers.*] I suppose you come back to us—to de Princess Pannonia's?

SIR GEORGE.

I don't think so.

FAY.

[*Drawing back.*] No?

SIR GEORGE.

Very likely I shall lodge, for a time, somewhere near you—near the Princess. It may be necessary for me to do so.

FAY.

[*Dipping her hands into the finger-bowl and drying them upon a napkin.*] Necessary? vy?

SIR GEORGE.

In the event of certain contingencies, the law requires it.

FAY.

De law!

SIR GEORGE.

Fay dear, let me impart to you a secret—that, tomorrow, may be no secret.

FAY.

Secret?

SIR GEORGE.

Perhaps the Princess and I are going to—to solace each other in middle-age. [*She stands quite still.*] Going to be husband and wife.

FAY.

[*Quietly.*] Is dat so?

SIR GEORGE.

Supposing we elect to be married at the Consulate in Paris—as quiet a way of getting through with it as we could adopt, it is required that both parties reside in the district for three weeks immediately preceding; and therefore—therefore——

FAY.

Derefore, for dose tree veeks you vill come to lodge near us. I see.

[*She goes to a tree, and stands, slightly leaning against it, looking away from him.*

SIR GEORGE.

I am assuming that the Princess would desire the marriage to take place without delay. Indeed I am assuming more than that—for she has not yet honoured me by positively deciding in my favour.

FAY.

No?

SIR GEORGE.

She suggested she should have a stated time in which to weigh the matter carefully. That time expires to-day, or to-morrow.

FAY.

She vill say Yes, I 'ope. Do you tink she vill?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] From her bearing, during those first few days of my illness—those critical days and nights—yes, she will.

FAY.

[*Partly turning to him.*] She is a beautiful voman. You are very much in love?

SIR GEORGE.

The Princess fully understands the feelings of sympathy and affection I have for her.

FAY.

Is affection—love?

SIR GEORGE.

Yes—of a kind.

FAY.

Of a kind?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Rising.*] My dear, I am not a young man.

FAY.

[*Slowly coming to the table.*] Dose who love deep never grow old, I have 'eard it said. Dey may die of age, but dey die young. You ought to love de Princess.

SIR GEORGE.

Love may give perpetual youth to the heart, but can love, in one no longer young, secure in perpetuity the responding love which it may have chanced to awaken?

FAY.

[*Shaking her head.*] I don't understand——

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking away from her.*] For instance, supposing a man were so unfortunate as to—to love—a woman—not half his age?

FAY.

One who loved 'im back again?

SIR GEORGE.

At the beginning, perhaps—yes. What end could there possibly be to that?

FAY.

I tink, love, real love, cannot see age

[*He sits, with his head bowed.*

FAY.

Vy 'ave you not told me before—about de Princess?

SIR GEORGE.

[*In a low voice.*] I have been in a dream. I wanted to put off the waking. I have been dreaming *I* am young.

FAY.

[*After a pause.*] I—I am going to find Annis.

[*She leaves him. He remains seated. Her gloves are lying upon the grass; he discovers them, picks them up, and presses them to his lips.* SIR ROBERT CHICHELE'S *voice is heard.*

SIR ROBERT.

[*In the distance.*] I see a table-cloth.

[*Thrusting the gloves into his breast,* SIR GEORGE *rises and walks away.* SIR ROBERT *appears, followed by* LADY CHICHELE *and the* PRINCESS PANNONIA, *and, after a short interval, by* EDWARD ORIEL. *The* PRINCESS *is dressed severely in dark colours; she looks pale and oppressed.* EDWARD, *who palpably shares her mood, has returned to the style of clothes worn by him in the first act. He walks about, dejectedly.*

SIR ROBERT.

Where are they all?

LADY CHICHELE.

[*To the* PRINCESS.] Those new roans of yours have done the distance almost as quickly as our lumbering train.

SIR ROBERT.

[*Looking into the distance.*] He must be hereabout.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Following him.*] Robert—I wish you to tell Laura. [*Returning to the* PRINCESS, *in a flutter.*] I had no opportunity of talking to you this morning. We have great news for you.

PRINCESS.

[*In an absent way.*] News?

SIR ROBERT.

Er—ahem! I—ah—have made up my mind, Laura, to resign my command.

PRINCESS.

Not to return to India?

SIR ROBERT.

Quite so. Winnifred and I have been sitting in council. We have decided. We cannot bear another wrench. We will never part again, voluntarily.

LADY CHICHELE.

[*Laughing bashfully, and hiding her face against the* PRINCESS'S *shoulder.*] Ha, ha! what do you think of that?

SIR ROBERT.

It all comes to this. In time of peace, I am but an indifferent, unambitious soldier.

LADY CHICHELE.

The fact is, I am the wrong wife for a soldier.

SIR ROBERT.

Some truth there! The wife for a soldier is one who enables him to forget that she is also his sweetheart.

LADY CHICHELE.

Now, that's enough, Robert!

[*The* PRINCESS, *kissing* LADY CHICHELE, *gives her hand to* SIR ROBERT.

SIR ROBERT.

Aha! thank ye. [*Turning away.*] Come! let us take a walk among these pretty trees. We shall fall across Lamorant.

PRINCESS.

Leave me here, you two. When you find Sir George, send him to me.

SIR ROBERT.

[*Gallantly offering his arm to* LADY CHICHELE.] Winnie?

LADY CHICHELE.

Thank you, Bob.

[*They wander away, like lovers. The* PRINCESS *watches them depart, while* EDWARD *stands, as if waiting to gain her attention.*

PRINCESS.

[*Turning to him, coldly, but drawing a deep breath.*] Well——?

EDWARD.

[*Bitterly.*] Those horses might have travelled more slowly.

PRINCESS.

Why protract pain any longer—defer the inevitable——?

EDWARD.

[*His eyes meeting hers for a moment.*] Inevitable?

PRINCESS.

Inevitable. I am quite determined, Edward—and I have your promise that you will distress me by no further appeal.

EDWARD.

[*Bowing.*] Yes. The month is over.

PRINCESS.

Over. [*Looking at him askance.*] It has been a happy month?

EDWARD.

In moments of forgetfulness, exquisitely so. The time you have felt it your duty to devote to Sir George Lamorant, in consequence of his illness, has unfortunately broken in upon it—but I do not complain.

PRINCESS.

That is a very proper feeling. [*Going to him.*] Thank you for driving with me here. [*Giving him the tips of her fingers.*] Adieu.

EDWARD.

[*Barely touching her hand.*] Adieu.

[*She leaves him and goes to a tree on the right, while he turns and walks slowly away, in an opposite direction.*

PRINCESS.

Edward——! [*He pauses in his walk.*] You shall hear it from me. You would hear it elsewhere to-morrow. I—I am going to marry.

EDWARD.

[*Coming forward a step or two.*] Marry!

PRINCESS.

A dear old friend—George Lamorant.

EDWARD.

Lamorant!

PRINCESS.

This marriage was spoken of between us, almost decided upon, a month ago.

EDWARD.

A month ago!

PRINCESS.

The thought came to me that I would snatch a month's illusion out of life before I became fully pledged. [*Approaching him, piteously.*] You forgive me? Come! you and I have watched the stars, and wondered, and talked like boy and girl, for a whole month, have we not? Edward, you forgive me?

EDWARD.

[*Facing her, sternly.*] No. No, I will never forgive you.

PRINCESS.

Ah—! [*Retreating.*] I like you better for it. [*Sinking into a chair.*] I would rather you did not.

EDWARD.

[*Standing over her.*] What is your motive? It is not *Lamorant* you love. [*She laughs, lightly, hysterically.*] You may believe in the soundness of your reasons for banishing *me*. But, Lamorant——!

PRINCESS.

You shall not disturb me, Edward. Motive? Boy, I am going to meet old-age half-way—to marry a man whose gaze, like my own, is always turned in the direction of sunset. He and I will humour each other's weaknesses. We will not play at being younger, but at being older, than we are. It is the fight against the years that tortures; defeat is endurable.

EDWARD.

[*Looking into the distance.*] Here is Lamorant.

PRINCESS.

[*Starting to her feet.*] Once more—adieu.

EDWARD.

[*Passionately.*] Laura——!

PRINCESS.

[*Drawing herself erect.*] Mr. Oriel—the month is over.

[*He turns from her, and goes away.* SIR GEORGE *approaches in a reverie. On seeing the* PRINCESS, *he starts, advances to her, and takes her hand.*

SIR GEORGE.

My dear Laura——

PRINCESS.

[*Constrainedly*] George. You are looking better this morning—more colour. The arm—is it less painful?

SIR GEORGE.

[*In the same way.*] Much less—much.

PRINCESS.

I am glad.

SIR GEORGE.

It is kind of you to come out to Fontenay so early to-day.

PRINCESS.

I *am* earlier than I have been of late—am I not? [*A pause.*] But you are conscious of what to-day is, George?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Calmly.*] To-day? Oh, yes, perfectly—if you allude to——?

PRINCESS.

To our interview of a month ago. The month is over, you know.

SIR GEORGE.

I know—it is over. [*She faces him, and lays her hand in his deliberately.*] Ah? Am I to understand——?

PRINCESS.

Yes.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Bending over her hand.*] My dear friend! [*She moves away to the tree and stands there with her back towards him.*

His hand is upon the chair below the table.] Won't you—? Pray——

[*She makes no movement. He carries the chair and deposits it beside her.*

PRINCESS.

[*Turning to him.*] George, I wish to let you know—it is my duty to tell you—I was not quite open with you, a month ago, as to my reasons for desiring to make myself "safe," as we both expressed it.

SIR GEORGE.

Were you not?

PRINCESS.

No. The injudicious, undignified, marriage I professed myself frightened of was not the mere chimera you perhaps thought it. I was actually on the brink of such a marriage—resisting the idea strenuously, but, nevertheless, tottering, falling.

SIR GEORGE.

I confess, my dear Laura, I didn't suspect you to be in immediate danger.

PRINCESS.

Ask me——

SIR GEORGE.

Tell me——

PRINCESS.

Mr. Oriel and I love each other—did love each other, exceedingly.

SIR GEORGE.

Mr. Oriel! the cold-blooded boy!

PRINCESS.

He is less—cold-blooded—than—people imagine.

SIR GEORGE.

A warm-blooded boy, then.

PRINCESS.

George, he his twenty-seven—eight——

SIR GEORGE.

I meant, boy by comparison——

PRINCESS.

Oh, spare me!

SIR GEORGE.

Ah! by comparison with myself. And when—am I asking too much?—when did you and he——?

PRINCESS.

Finally break asunder?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Assenting, with a nod.*] Um.

PRINCESS.

He was kind enough to escort me here. He has just left me. [*She sits. He walks about, disturbed.*

SIR GEORGE.

I—I am truly sorry for you, dear Laura. I am desperately sorry.

PRINCESS.

[*Leaning back, her eyes closed.*] You are always so gentle, so considerate.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Returning to her.*] Er—I—I presume—it is quite done with?

PRINCESS.

[*Sitting upright, her eyes flashing.*] George!

SIR GEORGE.

Ah, I was wrong to ask.

PRINCESS.

Oh, very wrong. You must never hint at such a thing again!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Moving away.*] No, no.

PRINCESS.

[*Going to him, penitently.*] I am a little sharp with you to day. To-morrow I shall be different. Poor gallant, crippled Butterfly!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Putting his arm through hers, gratefully.*] Ah——!

[*They walk about together, arm in arm.*

PRINCESS.

So, it is settled. Let it be done soon. I have begun my new life already, George, as I have shaped it. You observe my sombre gown? And I have had my hair dressed stiffly. Two emotionless, sedate, middle-aged egotists!

SIR GEORGE.

Egotists? Yes, I suppose middle-age is a period of inordinate egotism.

PRINCESS.

[*Deep in thought.*] Or are people, of any age, who are in love, abnormally egotistical? [*Rousing herself.*] But *your* egotism cannot be the egotism of love—can it? [*She leaves him, and walks about moodily.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*After a brief silence, hesitatingly.*] Laura, I think it is perhaps only fair to you that I should offer you confidence for confidence.

PRINCESS.

[*Pausing in her walk.*] How——?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Half-sitting upon the table.*] Do you remember my laughing away your suggestion that *I* might, at some time, be weak enough——?

PRINCESS.

Perfectly.

SIR GEORGE.

Well, I was mistaken; mistaken in my estimate of myself, of my disposition, my strength of character—mistaken.

PRINCESS.

[*Coming forward, a step or two.*] What—! *You* have——!

SIR GEORGE.

Yes.

PRINCESS.

Since we talked in that way, a month ago——!

SIR GEORGE.

Yes.

PRINCESS.

[*After a pause.*] You had better not tell me any more, George.

SIR GEORGE.

As you wish.

PRINCESS.

With somebody much younger than yourself, I assume?

SIR GEORGE.

Considerably.

PRINCESS.

Oh—! Blanche Oriel!

SIR GEORGE.

No, no!

PRINCESS.

You don't mean—Annis Marsh!

SIR GEORGE.

[*In a low voice, facing her.*] Fay.

PRINCESS.

[*Stonily.*] Fay!

SIR GEORGE.

[*Sitting.*] Fay.

PRINCESS.

[*Walking about.*] This is very distressing. [*Coming to him.*] Does she—suspect?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking upon the ground.*] A woman's intuition——

PRINCESS.

[*Wincing.*] Sssh! I know. Has she any warmth of feeling for you, in return?

SIR GEORGE.

She is blind.

PRINCESS.

But has she?

SIR GEORGE.

I fear so.

PRINCESS.

[*Frowning.*] George—you haven't talked love together?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking round.*] This place—the influence of it——

PRINCESS.

[*Looking round.*] I know. But have you?

SIR GEORGE.

Only in the abstract.

PRINCESS.

[*Leaving him.*] The abstract——! [*He rises. They walk about, he in one direction, she in another, then they meet.*] What are her views, may I ask?

SIR GEORGE.

That those who love deeply cannot age——

PRINCESS.

That those—who love deeply—cannot age?

SIR GEORGE.

Yes.

PRINCESS.

If it were so!

SIR GEORGE.

Nor perceive age in those they love.

PRINCESS.

What a blessed creed!

SIR GEORGE.

Yes.

PRINCESS.

For you and for me.

SIR GEORGE.

For you and for me.

PRINCESS.

Do you—believe it?

SIR GEORGE.

Do you? [*She puts her hand to her brow. Looking into the distance.*] There is Fay.

PRINCESS.

[*Passing him.*] Don't let me meet her. [*Drawing back.*] Ah—— !

SIR GEORGE.

What—— ?

PRINCESS.

[*Looking into the distance.*] Look ! Aunt Mary and Blanche—they promised to follow me. But—do you see whom they are talking to ?

SIR GEORGE.

Mr. Oriel.

[*They stand staring at each other, like two frightened people.*

PRINCESS.

[*Panting.*] George—you and I, bound ! it would be madness !

SIR GEORGE.

Would it ?

PRINCESS.

We should hate each other.

SIR GEORGE.

Not I, you.

PRINCESS.

You're not a woman. Release me!

SIR GEORGE.

Eh?

PRINCESS.

I release *you*. I release you! I release you! [*They turn their heads, he to look at* FAY, *she to watch* EDWARD.] Edward is going! he is going! [*Grasping his arm.*] George—*what shall we do?*

SIR GEORGE.

Laura—!

[*They again stare at each other. Then, slowly, she turns her head once more towards the left.*]

PRINCESS.

[*With a low, prolonged cry.*] Oh! He 's gone!

[*She rushes away. After a pause, he walks in the opposite direction.*

SIR GEORGE.

[*Calling, softly.*] Fay!

[*She approaches, with heavy steps and drooping head.*

FAY.

[*Her eyes avoiding his.*] You call me?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Producing her gloves.*] I—I have found your gloves.

FAY.

[*Taking them.*] T'ank you. [*She passes him, as if going.*

SIR GEORGE.

Fay—may I keep them? [*She raises her eyes to his for a moment, reproachfully, then lays the gloves upon the table, and again moves away.*] Stop! [*Replacing the gloves in his breast.*] The Princess and I have just been talking together. We have realized that we have been on the verge of an act of folly.

FAY.

[*Coldly.*] Yes?

SIR GEORGE.

We have perceived that we are both, unhappily perhaps, capable of loving—with a love which neither one can feel for the other. She and I are simple friends again. I believe friendship has never escaped a direr peril.

FAY.

[*Showing anxiety to depart.*] Vell——?

SIR GEORGE.

[*Going to her.*] Fay—you see I am now quite free to start upon the journey I planned. Shall I go? [*She stands motionless, with her eyes closed.*] I love you. I love you. I love you. I have loved you since—oh, for these many days. You know it.

FAY.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Yes.

SIR GEORGE.

You—you—return my love?

FAY.

[*Faintly.*] You know it.

SIR GEORGE.

For how long have you loved me?

FAY.

Since—for dese many days.

SIR GEORGE.

[*Looking into the distance.*] Lady Ringstead and Miss Oriel. Maxime——

[*They walk away, slowly, side by side, murmuring to each other.*

SIR GEORGE.

I love you.

FAY.

Oh, I know it.

SIR GEORGE.

You love me!

FAY.

You know it.

[*They go out of sight.* SIR ROBERT *and* LADY CHICHELE *appear, talking intently. They pause, and* SIR ROBERT *kisses* LADY CHICHELE. *Thereupon they wander away, their heads close together. After they have disappeared,* DEMAILLY *and* ANNIS *approach, his arm about her waist.*

DEMAILLY.

The old people. Let them get on.

ANNIS.

[*Wistfully.*] Not more than a week, Maxime? not more?

DEMAILLY.

Perhaps less. Come with me to the gate. I won't say good-bye to the others. I want only you——

[*They also kiss, and wander away. When they have gone,* BLANCHE *and* LADY RINGSTEAD *appear.*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Looking behind her.*] Has Laura become a wild thing? She passed us like the wind. They say women can't run.

BLANCHE.

Women can do anything.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

They're allowed to make the attempt, now-a-days. Except to murder their babies. Infanticide is still forbidden, I'm told.

BLANCHE.

[*Looking into the distance.*] Aunt—! come here! [LADY RINGSTEAD *joins her.*] Look!

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Lamorant and Miss Zuliani.

BLANCHE.

[*In mysterious tones.*] Aunt Mary, do you know what I *think?*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Heaven forbid, my dear—or any other young girl!

BLANCHE.

Those two people *like* each other.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

In a marrying sense!

BLANCHE.

Yes.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Don't fill my ears with such stuff!

BLANCHE.

Remember how they've been thrown together. And then, Fay's romantic history. It all helps.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Tsch! a girl of nineteen. Why, he'll be fifty before her waist is settled.

[*From the distance comes the faint, almost imperceptible sound of music—a military band playing a jubilant March.*

BLANCHE.

We'll see. [*Showing some agitation.*] And, oh, auntie, I have something else upon my mind—something that concerns *us*.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Alarmed.*] Blanche!

BLANCHE.

It has worried me for a fortnight, or more; I can't keep it to myself any longer.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

What—— ?

BLANCHE.

Edward——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Edward!

BLANCHE.

I believe—Edward—is getting—too fond of Laura. [LADY RINGSTEAD *grasps* BLANCHE'S *arm and glares at her.*] I did give him a hint that I'm not quite a fool, a week ago. But he took hold of me, and hissed in my face, and his lip went up——

[*The sound of the music draws nearer.* SIR ROBERT *appears.*

SIR ROBERT.

[*Excitedly.*] Ha! quick! here's a battalion of Chasseurs marching down the lane. Very interesting! Does anybody want to see 'em?

BLANCHE.

We'll come, Sir Robert.

[SIR ROBERT *disappears, in a hurry.*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Sinking into the chair—stupefied.*] Let me think—let me think——!

[*The music grows louder, and louder.* SIR GEORGE *and* FAY *return.* BLANCHE *goes to them.* FAY *embraces her and whispers to her. Then there is a still louder burst of music, and the* PRINCESS *approaches quickly.* EDWARD *follows her, and comes to* LADY RINGSTEAD. *The* PRINCESS *has allowed her cape to slip from her shoulders, she carries her fan by its ribbons, and her hair is flowing*

to her waist. Her cheeks are flushed and her eyes glow with the light of girlhood. The sound of the music diminishes slightly.

PRINCESS.

[*Excitedly.*] Do you hear that March? Don't look at me—a bough of a tree has caught my hair—! Do you hear it? It is by Klotz. *I* first heard it, years ago, in the Stadtwäldchen at Pesth. It is called, "A szerelim mindig ifju marad!" Do you know what that means? [*Opening her arms.*] Fay——! [FAY *goes to the* PRINCESS, *who folds her in an embrace.*] George!

[SIR GEORGE *advances to her, laughingly.* FAY *and* BLANCHE *again whisper together.*

[*To* SIR GEORGE—*softly.*] Butterfly——?

SIR GEORGE.

[*To* EDWARD.] Mr. Oriel, I crave your leave. [*Kissing the* PRINCESS *upon her brow.*] Princess——

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*Who has risen—her hand to her heart.*] His leave! [*To* EDWARD.] Edward, tell me——!

[*He inclines his head, silently.* FAY *comes forward, and stands on* SIR GEORGE'S *right.* BLANCHE *comes to* EDWARD, *on his left.*

LADY RINGSTEAD.

[*To* SIR GEORGE, *unsteadily.*] And you—and that sweet Italian thing——?

SIR GEORGE.

Yes.

LADY RINGSTEAD.

Are you sane, all of you—any of you? Are you real? To me, you appear like dream-people—fantastic creatures—[*To* EDWARD.] Oh, my boy!

[*She breaks down, puts her handkerchief to her eyes, and weeps upon* EDWARD'S *shoulder. The music swells again.*

PRINCESS.

[*To* LADY RINGSTEAD.] No, we are real, aunt! Don't say that we have any part in a dream——! Hark! listen to my March! that's real! "A szerelim mindig ifju marad!" "*Love is ever young!*"

FAY.

[*To* SIR GEORGE.] Ah——!

SIR GEORGE.

[*To her, in a whisper.*] And ever blind? you are sure?

[*Unobserved by the others, she touches his face with her lips.*

THE END.